בימים ההמה אשר יחזיקו עשרה
אנשים מכל לשונות הגוים והחזיקו
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Ḥerûṯênû, Our LIBERATION

Issue Four, June /July 2006

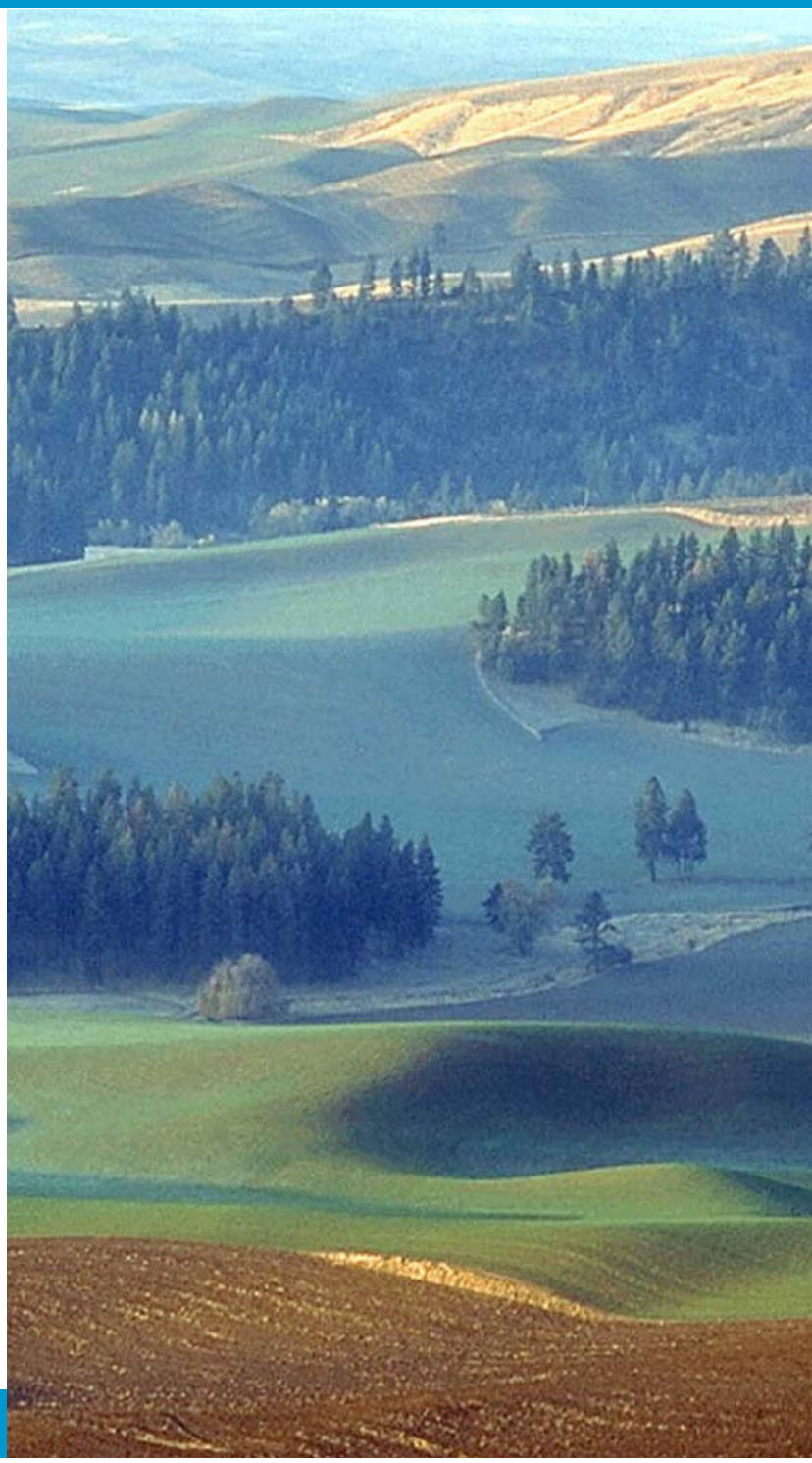
The Harvest Continues

The Ebionite Community is certainly not the first group of people who have taught a return to Torah, or resisted the highly questionable Christian version of Yeshua bar Yosef in modern times. But few, if any, teach or follow Yeshua the Jew as a Jew.

But when I began, Ebionites were no longer in existence, and there was relatively little written about them. But in the last twenty-five years more and more scholars are speaking about Ebionites or the Ebionite view as that of Yeshua and his movement. Many people come to us while those scholars outside our movement prepare the soil and plant or tend a seed. But God is the Planter and Harvester, and we must trust His farming skills.

Because of exposed deceptions in Christianity many scholars are dismantling the veracity of its claim of being the religion of Yeshua, and popular media makes fortunes from million's distrust. Yet a real Yeshua, his service, his humanity, his devotion to the God of Israel inspires all. They hunger for a man, not a mystery god. The harvest continues.

But the land, whither you go to possess it, is a land of hills and valleys, and drinks water of the rain of heaven: A land which YHWH thy God cares for: the eyes of YHWH thy God are always upon it, from the beginning of the year even unto the end of the year. And it shall come to pass, if you shall hearken diligently unto My commandments which I command you this day, to love YHWH thy God, and to serve Him with all your heart and with all your soul, I will give you the rain of your land in his due season, the first rain and the latter rain, that thou may gather in thy grain, and thy wine, and thine oil. And I will send grass in thy fields for thy cattle, that thou may eat and be full. —Deut 11:10-15



The Ebionite Manifesto

The Ebionite Community is the living continuation of the Jewish religious movement of Jesus. Christianity is the religion of Paul and others, and not part of the biblical faith and revelation of the God of Israel nor is it of Jesus.

We declare the man Paul of Tarsus, the false teacher against the mark of Covenant and God's Torah, to be outside of the Way taught by Yeshua, the anointed, son of Miryam and Yosef.

Let his name, Paul, be accursed as he called God's Torah a curse. Let the afflictions he incited the gentiles to heap upon God's name and upon His People strike such great shame upon the gentiles that decent people among them will seek God in repentance from the man of Tarsus' Great Sin. Let the frontlets of their eyes and arm be bound with God's Torah and resist the mark of lawlessness.

We call upon the gentiles to repent, to abandon paganism and the perverse testament, and enter into true covenant through Torah, circumcision, and immersion in order to submit and prepare for the Reign of God as brothers exhibiting good works.

Your teachers, popes, ministers, priests, and leaders lead you to the outer darkness. They lie to you, rob you, abuse you, and use you to do likewise to others as they consume the whole world. They are idolaters who feed at Mammon's breast and have built the empire of Edom for two thousand years.

We expose your "apostle" as false; your "testament" as false; your society as false; your church, its rulers, your governments as false. Our allegiance and hope is to the God of Israel alone.

Yahwism, the faith of the Written Torah given by the One God, is a revolutionary system of life with justice that can supercede all other systems of government and ideologies. The Evyonim are Yahwists above all else. It allows for One Ruler, the God of Israel alone, with none beside Him. God is not man, and no man is divine. No man can make you right with God except yourself, and only you can atone for your sins through repentance and reparation to Him and your fellow man. You will never find God, Yahweh King of the Universe, world within worlds, worlds without end, in a church or shrine, kneeling before statues, sticks, stones, or men. Tear down your church and masjid. Take the wood and stones and build houses for the poor; take the sticks for firewood; sell the treasure and idols to buy food and heal the sick; bring all men in love to bend the knee to the God of Israel. **Yahweh Alone**.

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Calendar

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June /July 2006

Readings for Shabbat, June and July 2006

Week	Parasha	Haftara	Tehillim
May 28 –June 3	Naso: Nu 4:21-7:89	Ju 13:2-25	93-95
June 4 –10	Beha'alotekha: Nu. 8.1-12.16	Zk 2.14-4.7	96
June 11 –17	Shelakh: Nu 13.1-15.	41Jos 2.1-24	97
June 18 –24	Qorakh: Nu 16.1-18.32	I Sa 11.14-12.22	98-99
June 25 –July 1	Khukkat: Nu. 19:1-22:1	Ju 11:1-33	100
July 2 –8	Bal'ak: 22:2-25:9	Mic 5:6-6:8	101-102
July 9 –15	Pinkhas: Nu 25:10-30:1	1 Ki 18:46-19:21	103
July 16 –22	Mattot: Nu 30:2-32:42	Jer 1:1-2:3	104
	Ma'asei: Nu 33:1-36:13	Jeremiah 32.6-27	105-106
July 23 –29	D'varim: De 1:1-3:22	Jer 2:4-28; 3:4; 4:1-2 (S'fardi omit 3:4)	107-110
July 30 -August 5	Wa'etkhanan: De 3:23-7:11	Is 1:1-27	111-114

Expected New Moon (Rosh Ḥodesh) Days

From Jerusalem
Tuesday evening, June 27, 2006 (1-5%)
Thursday evening, July 27, 2006 (5%)

New Moon Reading: Genesis 1:14-18; Psalm 104; Psalm 89

Special Days

Shavu'ot "Pentecost" evening of Saturday, June 3 through Sunday

The BONES of Jesus

In the last issue of **Our Liberation** *I showed how the resurrection of Yeshua could be used by Paul of Tarsus as a means of creating a non-historical god of which Paul became the single source of true and final revelation. This type of manipulation on the part of Paul makes the whole proposition of Yeshua being resurrected doubtful.*

Some readers were disturbed about my apparent doubts of Yeshua's resurrection, and indeed, like Paul's concern quoted in the article, were asking if there is no resurrection then why care anything about Yeshua?

In this follow-up article I will discuss a matter of faith that may trouble some readers even more. In the last article in a series (now) on this subject, I will discuss the possibility of resurrection and Jewish beliefs and precedents concerning resurrection and the belief in the days of Yeshua in contrast to pagan ones already taken up in the first article.

Several years ago I remember seeing a television program in which Dominic Crossan, a former Catholic priest and well-known "historical Jesus"

scholar stated that Yeshua was not resurrected and most likely was ignobly thrown to the street dogs as carrion in the local dump. This is not a quote, but the gist of his declaration which evidently disturbed many viewers in fundamentalist Christian America.

A recent book in the historical Jesus discipline by James D. Tabor of the University of North Carolina called the *Jesus Dynasty* (New York: 2006) also discusses the subject of Yeshua's demise and dogmatic claims concerning his resurrection. Rightly, Tabor limits his work to historical evidence before speculating within his findings. One of the most interesting of many good discussions of the book looks at possible tomb sites for Yeshua's family and Yeshua himself. Several tombs have been found exactly where one might be expected, on the Mount of Olives and in Talipot just south. On the mount's property belonging to a Christian Franciscan sanctuary are over forty ossuaries (bone boxes of carved stone) include names Lazarus, John, Joseph, Judah, Martha, Miryam, Matthew, Salome, Simeon, Yeshua, and also Simon bar Jonah (pp. 235-6). At the tomb in Talipot similar names can be found (pp. 15-33). These could possibly identify people in Yeshua's family, and perhaps Yeshua also someday. And even more startling may be a mention of Yeshua's burial place in Galilee, near the town renowned by mystics, Tsafat (or Safed), in the writings of *Jewish* qabbalist Isaac ben Luria from the 16th century describing *Yeshua* as one of many *righteous* men buried in that area (pp. 238-9)!

To say that Yeshua had a burial place at all was a dangerous affront to Christians in Luria's day just as it is not well-advised for the same reasons today. Tabor explains that neither Christian nor Jewish authorities today want to find or make known Yeshua's burial site because doing so would have grave consequences for both. As Paul himself stated, as noted in the last article, without a resurrected and exalted Jesus there is no reason for Christianity to exist! A worldwide spiritually, financially, and temporally dominant religion would be attacked and perhaps toppled with such a discovery. While die-hard Christians might explain it away as a demonic plot or as scientifically flawed regardless of evidence, it would cause a great hardship to maintain the faith (or keep purveyors of the Jesus Business in paychecks).

First, I am not sure that resurrection was ever a reality, but I cannot disprove it completely without irrefutable evidence. Mark, accepted by most scholars to be the earliest gospel written not long after the fall of Jerusalem, makes no mention of the resurrection in the earliest manuscripts. From Mark 16:9 through the end is a later addition by Christians trying to make the gospel conform to the other gospels and Paul's teaching of a resurrected "Christ." Neither Clement nor Origen, both orthodox followers of Paul, mention a resurrection. None of the Christian gospels are consistent in their resurrection accounts.

> So what about your faith? Does it stand up to a grave or ossuary full of Yeshua's bones? As an Ebionite I can say, yes. No problem.

There is no real teaching of an afterlife in heavenly bliss or otherwise until late in Israel's history. It becomes familiar only a century or so before Yeshua's day in the book of Daniel, and some apocryphal writings like the Wisdom of Solomon, etc., and is spoken of most, but not consistently, in writings of Yeshua's day and after. Until then the earlier belief, sans afterlife, served the followers of Yahweh whose goal it was to live by His Torah in an idealized nation devoted to Him. No one said, 'We are defeated by gentiles and the Torah has been abandoned—don't concern yourself because everything will be okay in heaven!' This was not the attitude of 'Iyyov (Job) when he lost everything while trying to remain true to God; instead, his reward finally came in earthly form. But I will not argue that Jews in Yeshua's had no belief in the immortal soul or resurrection. Most did.

Perhaps Yeshua initiates a new state for humanity that moves on from their worldly existence. But that is not what we are to base our attachment to Yeshua upon. Christianity teaches that "believing on Yeshua" entitles us to whatever it was that Yeshua attained. What was it he attained and why? The gospels has it that Yeshua was beaten severely, his side stabbed to leave an open wound in his side and holes of torn flesh in his wrists and ankles, and died. He lay in a burial cave for three days and nights, a corpse swelling and decomposing. Then he is raised from the dead, wounds intact which Thomas places his hand within. Then there is the raised Yeshua

possessing a spiritual incorruptible body of Paul's description that bypasses the fleshly problem.

Yeshua himself is said to have not cared much for the miracle watchers.

> Luke 6:46 And why call ye me, lord, lord, and do not the things which I say?

> Matthew 7:20 Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them. 21 Not every one that saith unto me, lord, lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. 22 Many will say to me in that day, lord, lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? 23 And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity.

Yet we return to the gospel of Mark's spurious added conclusion to see miracles used as the basis of belief in Yeshua.

> 16:17 And these signs shall follow them that believe; In my name shall they cast out devils; they shall speak with new tongues; 18 They shall take up serpents; and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them; they shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover. 19 So then after the Lord had spoken unto them, he was received up into heaven, and sat on the right hand of God. 20 And they went forth, and preached every where, the Lord working with *them*, and confirming the word with signs following. Amen.

We choose, as Ebionites, to look at Yeshua as a teacher who expects his students to follow his example and do what he taught. It is the approach of Yahweh Who wants us to obey, keep, and observe His commandments. His miracles only serve the purpose to get our attention so we will do what He asks. And if Yeshua was resurrected it would only be to get our attention in order that we do what God commands. In Yahwism, there is no belief aside from doing what Yahweh commands. Yeshua's brother Ya`aqov expressed this very clearly.

> James 2:14 What *doth it* profit, my brethren, though a man say he hath faith, and have not works? can faith save him? 15 If a brother or sister be naked, and destitute of daily food, 16 And one of you say unto them, Depart in peace, be *ye* warmed and filled; notwithstanding ye give them not those things which are needful to the body; what *doth it* profit? 17 Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone. 18 Yea, a man may say, Thou hast faith, and I have works: shew me thy faith without thy works, and I will shew thee my faith by my works. 19 Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well: the devils also believe, and tremble. 20 But wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead? 21 Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he had offered Isaac his son upon the altar? 22 Seest thou how faith wrought with his works, and by works was faith made perfect? 23 And the scripture was fulfilled which saith, Abraham believed God, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness: and he was called the Friend of God. 24 Ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only.

Christianity is dependent upon *Jesus'* resurrection for its *raison d'être* according to Paul as discussed in the last article. The Christian god, Christ, is a different person altogether from Yeshua, the historical person, and for Paul's Christians it is their belief in his resurrection that makes him so. But does a resurrection somehow disqualify or qualify Yeshua in such a "Pauline" way to a Jew and if so, how? Resurrection does not seem to be needed for Yeshuine Jews who actually followed him, as reflected in James. Nowhere is the earthshaking event of Yeshua's resurrection mentioned in James. Instead the murder of a "righteous one" (probably Yeshua, but not necessarily) is recorded and soon after readers are reminded that the Day of Yahweh (judgment) will come. Yeshuine Jews, as Jews, would have believed in a general resurrection of all Israel. They might be comforted by a resurrection of people before their very eyes, surely. But people have been raised before in the scriptures and Jewish culture.

Let us assume that the accounts in the post-resurrection descriptions in the Christian gospels and other writings are to be trusted. According to them all of the witnesses of Yeshua's resurrection appearances were Jews, including the vision of Paul who claimed to be a Jew. Should we not expect that this indicates a resurrection was something believable to Jews? In fact, it is.

We will not discuss a belief in a general resurrection in the Bible where all Israel or more are brought back from the dead, or the variety of details in the idea's presentation. Neither will we go into detail over differences of revivification, resuscitation, and resurrection. Here we must look at individuals brought back to life, agents of resuscitating individuals, and any meaning proffered by a resurrection.

The first mention of an individual who apparently did

not die is Ḥanôk (Enoch, in Gen 5:24). 2 Samuel 2:11 similarly tells of Eliyah being taken up by a whirlwind into the sky (yet Elisha tore his garment—a typical mourning practice). Before this (1 Kgs 17:17) Eliyah resuscitates a young man and the result is that his mother says, "Now I know that you are a man of God, and that the word of YHWH in your mouth is true." Elisha resuscitates a small child belonging to a woman of Shunem (2 Kgs 4:18-21, 32-37). Elisha does his master Eliyah one better when a corpse thrown into Elisha's tomb touches the bones of Elisha as a band of Moabites interrupts the intended proper burial. The corpse is revived and stands up (2 Kgs 13:20-21). We don't know that the situations actually describe comas or other medical conditions, but they do not bring startled reactions. The revived are not seen as divinely appointed, and no new religions come into being centering on these resurrections.

We also have a few resurrections /resuscitations in Rabbinic Literature perhaps during and after the days of Yeshua, in addition to miracles similar to those attributed to Yeshua. There are miraculous healings by Hanina ben Dosa, and Eleazar; a victory over demons, also by Hanina, while his wife multiplied bread. Honi the circle-drawer was able to bring rain, and both Gamaliel and Tanhuma stilled stormy seas. In the midrash Leviticus Rabbah, Rabbi was able to raise the servant of the Emperor Antoninus who had sent for him requesting his help. Rabbi Rabba accidentally killed his colleague Sera while intoxicated, but the next morning saw what he had done and asked God to revive his friend and He did. Shimon ben Yohai, Hanina bar Hama, and later the Baal Shem Tov, and Rabbi Schmelke of Nikolsburg are all accounted as raising the dead. Yet none of these, all considered pious men, are not worshipped nor did they start new religions nor are they objects of new cults. Yet none of these miracle workers were resurrected. The people that were resurrected by prophets and pious men, including Lazarus whom Yeshua raised, did not become sacred or revered as saviors or gods.

How was Yeshua's alleged resuscitation different? He was raised up without any agent other than God apparently. Does this make him a god? Matthew 27:52-53 reports that when Yeshua gave up his last breath, "Tombs also were opened, and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised. After his resurrection they came out from the tombs and entered the holy city and appeared to many." Who raised these people from the dead? If we say that Yeshua did, though dead, then we still have a miracle worker raising the dead like others did (consider Elisha's dead bones raising the dead, above). The most miraculous scenario is if God resurrected Yeshua—but not just Yeshua, but other saints, actually before Yeshua, were raised. Accordingly, the purported and perhaps possible resurrection of Yeshua is not the definitive event Christianity seems to believe it to be. It does establish that someone writing the account and similar ones clearly held Yeshua to be at least a saint, and perhaps preeminent among them, since Yeshua's death triggers other resurrections beforehand. Later Yeshua will descend into the skies, yet as Eliyah, and probably Enoch does before him.

In other words, Yeshua resurrected or dead as other men has no practical or theological bearing on Evyonut which has always celebrated *the man* Yeshua's goodness and inspired words. Like the Shunemite woman, we can say, "Now I know that you are a man of God, and that the word of YHWH in your mouth is true." What scholars are cautiously saying these days and causing a stir among the "faithful"—that Yeshua was just a man, that he died not as a savior but a righteous teacher—is nothing new for either the ancient Ebionites or the modern ones.

Does your faith in God depend upon a resurrection, a god man savior who is the key to the mystery of eternal life? You might want to reconsider how misplaced your faith is and from where it comes. A good place to start such soul-searching is in the religion of your fathers in Egypt, Canaan, Mesopotamia, Asia Minor, Greece, Rome and finally the religious culmination of these cultures in the Christian Church. Read about saviors born to virgins who suffered and died at the Spring Equinox to be resurrected as gods to ascend to the celestial realm; consider these gods' gift of everlasting life through mysteries and communions of bread, little cakes and wine. Is your faith like the devotees of Osiris (and Isis), Adonis, Dionysus, Attis, or Mithra.

But Ebionites should welcome the day that the bones of Yeshua. Perhaps it will force all to honor Yeshua through imitating his goodness and faith in God. It is worth remembering throughout the ages, that we too can be righteous men like Yeshua, but not gods. But too it will expose Paul, his god and priesthood and the lowest crimes ever perpetrated to maintain oppression and manipulation of millions.

From the book, *Jesus without Idolatry* by Shemayah Phillips

The Original Sin Myth, Mysticism, Messiahs, and Paganism

"Original Sin"

The Christian belief, concerning a Messiah as atonement, is drawn mostly from the pagan mystery religions and the occult. It relies on a belief that man is born in a state of spiritual defect, a state of *depravity*, and that we are damned because of a mistake made by our ancestors. Christian theologians claim that man was created good—but with the so-called "original sin" of the first human all mankind has the inherited tendency toward evil. It means that man is unable to do anything pleasing enough to justify himself before God. Only a perfect man (believed to have been Jesus) can override this flaw in humanity brought by the first man. The passage in Psalms 51 is used to support this allegation:

> Indeed, was I born in *ʿāwôn* and in *ḥēṭ͗* did she conceive me in sexual ardor (*yaḥēm*).

Some translations overlook the Hebrew (purposely?). David has committed a grave crime related to his sexual longing for a married woman. The word used for his mother's impregnation is that describing animals in rut (Holladay: 1971, p. 133 *yḥm*). David's sexual ardor parallels that of his own mother, whose bearing of David is called a crime or perversion (*ʿāwôn* "twisting of the accepted standard") and a transgression (*ḥēṭ͗* "failure" "sin"). As important a figure as David is, we cannot discover whom his mother was.

Sex is not negative in biblical thought as it became in Christianity, but we are instead to "seed," "become many," and "fill" the earth. A woman who gave birth had to be purified (Lev 12.2-8) in order to reenter the sanctuary precincts and a "sin" offering (*ḥaṭṭāṯ*) had to be brought after the period that she was impure from her flow of blood. We cannot be sure what sin was involved concerning David's conception.

What was the remedy for David's transgression? He tells us in the same Psalm:

> O YHWH, open my lips, and let my mouth declare Your praise.
> You do not want me to bring sacrifice; You do not desire burnt offerings;
> True sacrifice to God is a contrite spirit;
> God, You do not despise a contrite and broken heart. (17-19)

God wants sincere repentance, not sacrifice whether it is human or animal. Isn't it strange that none of God's People, including David—considered a messiah—was looking for a perfect human savior to save them metaphysically from their inherited depravity or eternal damnation, and that only with the advent of dualist Gnosticism and the mystery cults were such ridiculous propositions entertained by Hellenized Jews and gentiles?

Here is another verse used to promote the idea of original sin and depravity. In B'reishiyt (8.21-22) Yahweh says in His heart after Noah's sacrifice:

> I will not curse the ground on account of humanity again; indeed, the inclination (*yēṣer*) of man's heart is *raʿ* from their youth, but I will not strike all the living again as I have done. All the earth's days, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night will not end.

raʿ is a catchall word to cover almost anything not good. It is derived from the root *rʿʿ* "to be evil, bad". To do *raʿ* to someone is to do harm. In Jewish thought, man has two "inclinations," a *yēṣer ṭôḇ* and a *yēṣer raʿ*.

This bears out mankind's free will to choose what is either advantageous and beneficial to all or harmful and self-serving. Our choice to do benefit or harm can affect the innocent as well. The bad choice is always available to man's free will. It is not to be understood according to dualism as cosmic opposites, but integrated in man to let him choose to obey God or himself and his own agenda. The two inclinations can even be complimentary.

For example, a man may be very ambitious and even exploitive (not good) and follow his most lustful cravings to obtain women. The woman may be impressed by the wealth of a man and use schemes of her own to "feather her nest." God and His purpose for mankind are not necessarily involved here. But children are still conceived, families created, civilization built with people who will choose more altruistic views of life and even seek God in everything they do. The "bad inclination" can help bring about the good. Good or bad, ultimately, Yahweh's will is served.

The Hebrew word *nᵃᶜûrîm* from *naᶜar* (m.) makes the phrase "from his youth" (*minnᵃᶜurāyw*) refers to a specific stage of life of a person that we describe as a youngster. The passage is not speaking of depravity. If you have raised a child, perhaps you remember the time when they became aware for themselves, after conditioning, a distinction between "right and wrong." Guilt comes into play soon after as a result of failure to meet the standard of behavior. My own son was a very good child. But I remember the day he became despondent because he wanted to be "mean." He thought maybe he was now evil. I told him he was normal, and had what we call a conscience. If he knew what was wrong, he was also aware of what was right, and that this was the gift of choice God gives to man. He was growing into a fine adult responsible for his choices. (Actually, he said he wanted to "tear things up." I said, "Me too! But I shouldn't.") Only that some others would grow up and quit blaming and excusing their bad behavior on mythology.

Did free will come from the man's alleged sin of eating from the tree of good and evil? No. He chose to disobey first and listen to someone other than God. He was created that way. It was not a mistake; it was a gift. To say that his disobedience is passed on to all mankind genetically making us all guilty says that free will is useless. It says that we have only the consciousness of a beast. It puts our relationship with God on the level of a horse that will run from a predator or copulate in plain view without inhibition. The tree is a symbol of a free will unrestrained by good choices (obedience to God) and the willfulness to ignore God in rebellion. It also teaches that our choices are requests for the appropriate consequences we set in motion.

Dualism is a belief system that sees creation, man and "God" differently. In dualism the physical world is evil or lost and up for destruction. There is a need for salvation from this cosmic annihilation. But the same "Flood" passage used to show a depraved humanity and its need for "salvation" tells us plainly that the world will not be destroyed. Gnostic dualism of the early centuries explains that our very existence as material beings, and matter itself, is sin (and corruption) and as remedy provides a savior as the key to escape material existence slated for destruction. This is the basis of Christianity as a Gnostic system and its understanding of Jesus and salvation and why it is so different from biblical religion and the real "Jesus." Why do we need such a savior borrowed from Gnosticism? There are different types of dualism, some less extreme than that of the Gnostic Christians. Actually, in Zoroastrian dualism of the Persians (which predates and influenced Christianity and rabbinic Judaism), a person was treated better. The fires of "hell" were fires of purification to burn away impurity and sin. Such a "purgatory" persists in Jewish folklore and among some Jews still as Zoroastrian dualist ideas did infiltrate Hebrew thought and can be found in late post-exilic passages of the Bible, but especially in pseudepigraphic writings, and the Christian writings. But these are not part of the Yahwistic system.

Gnosticism and the Original Sin Doctrine

Gnosticism is the word given to describe a wide range of ancient, eclectic beliefs borrowed from various religions. Some ideas are Iranian (Zoroastrian), Greek, Indian, Egyptian, and original. It was part of a "spirit" of thought moving from the East in the Hellenistic age after the conquests of Alexander the Great, which, first, were of…

> …a decidedly religious nature; and this, as we have repeatedly stated, is the prominent characteristic of the second phase of Hellenistic culture in general. Second, all these currents have in some way to do with *salvation*: the general religion of the period is a religion of salvation. Third, all of them exhibit an exceedingly transcendant (i.e., transmundane) conception of God and in connection with it an equally transcendant and other-wordly idea of the goal of salvation. Finally, they maintain a radical *dualism*

> of realms of being—God and the world, spirit and matter, soul and body, light and darkness, good and evil, life and death—and consequently an extreme polarization of existence affecting not only man but reality as a whole: the general religion of the period is a *dualistic transcendental religion of salvation.*
>
> *(Jonas: 1963, pp. 31-32)*

Gnosticism is the extreme expression of the same dualistic transcendental religion of salvation found in Christianity.

In a general Gnostic dualist system, all physical existence is part of a lost creation inferior to the spiritual existence promised to devotees. The entire world is the property of the evil *Archons*, or their leader the *demiurge*; for the Christians this "person" is usually called Satan—but in some of the early Christian groups, Yahweh, the Hebrew God of the Bible was the demiurge. The Christian teacher Marcion taught this as his interpretation of Paul, and his version of Christianity saw the Torah and Jews as devoted to evil. (This man is also directly and indirectly responsible for Christians having a "New Testament.") Gnostics saw a very different creation or reality described as *kiy tov*, "very good" in the biblical account of Genesis.

> The universe, the domain of the Archons, is like a vast prison whose innermost dungeon is the earth, the scene of man's life. Around and above it the cosmic spheres are ranged like concentric enclosing shells. Most frequently there are the seven spheres of the planets surrounded by the eighth, that of the fixed stars…The religious significance of this cosmic architecture lies in the idea that everything that intervenes between here and the beyond serves to separate man from God, not merely by spatial distance but through active demonic force….
>
> The spheres are the seats of the Archons, especially the "Seven," that is, of the planetary gods borrowed from the Babylonian pantheon. It is significant that these are now often called by Old Testament names for God (Iao, Sabaoth, Adonai, Elohim, El Shaddai), which from being synonyms for the one and supreme God are by this transposition turned into proper names of inferior demonic beings—prejorative revaluation to which Gnosticism subjected ancient traditions in general and Jewish tradition in particular. The Archons collectively rule over the world, and each individually in this sphere is a warder of the cosmic prison. Their tyrannical world-rule is called heimarmene, universal Fate, a concept taken over from astrology but now tinged with the anti-cosmic spirit. In tis physical aspect this rule is the law of nature; in its psychical aspect, which includes for instance the institution and enforcement of the Mosaic Law, it aims at the enslavement of man. As guardian of this sphere, each Archon bars the passage to the souls that seek to ascend after death, in order to prevent their escape and their return to God.
>
> *(Jonas: 1963, p. 43)*

The world, according to Gnostic thought, was a mistake, a result of falling away from the light. Man, although created by the Archons, carnal and fleshly as the prototypical Adam, still contains in his soul a *pneuma*, or divine spark belonging to the true God (the *Monad*, the *Pleroma*, *Bythos*) beyond all matter and conception. Gnostics seek a non-worldly means of return of this spark to God. The reader of the "New Testament" may quickly recall its vocabulary of light, perfect, corruption, inner man, Adam, and spirit (*pneuma*) as opposed to flesh and the world. And the antagonism that Paul has to the Law of God becomes very suspicious, indeed.

In this Gnostic language Christian theology asserts that since one man made all subsequent humans evil and damned through his sin (if not his very existence), one man who is "perfect," in other words, who is sinless, ascended from the light, can serve as a vehicle to spiritual perfection and "salvation." We must be translated into a spirit form because all physical matter is destined to destruction. Christians call this the doctrine of "original sin" and is why they baptized tiny hell-bound infants born of and in sin. This salvation is not the salvation of scripture, but instead results in admission to God, and even for non-gnostic Greeks and Romans, a spiritual existence among the celestial beings and gods (stars and planets were thought to be divine beings) after death. To the Christian Mysteries this savior is Jesus who is man and a god, perfect and without sin (regardless of biblical sin). Physical acts of goodness are still evil (deficient) because they pertain to this evil, physical existence, and only a spiritual belief (a secret knowledge –*gnosis*) may serve in effecting salvation, thus the Christian insistence on the contrast of "faith versus works." Faith is "knowing Christ crucified" as a spiritual experience. (This is made very clear by Paul of Tarsus' use of plhrwma according to the Gnostic usage as the totality of God's powers in Col 1:19ff., 2:9ff. and also Eph 1:23 and 3:19. And this is why Christian salvation from the corrupted world and creation through a *gnosis* of a Christ in which the "totality" of God resides has nothing whatsoever to do with biblical ideas of sin or salvation.) An initiation is expected or required (communion, baptism) depending on the sect to ritualize and

finalize the mystical experience. As Hans Jonas explains above, Gnosticism is an expression of a general religious tendency. We see the syncretism of the ancient non-wordly schemes of salvation triumph in Christianity.

The problems with this entire scheme of "original sin," a rival god who controls the world or mankind, a flawed and evil creation, or sons damned for the mistakes of their father, or fathers for those of their sons (See below, Matthew 4) is that it can only be constructed from biblical sources with bits and pieces found in post-exilic, dualistically influenced writings. Neither is the "Messiah" alluded to in scripture the *cosmic* savior of all men.

Let us suppose that Christianity's doctrine of original sin is valid. If all mankind can be considered evil based on the rebellion of the first human couple, and children must suffer because of the sin of parents, then let us apply this to Christian history. When the persecutions and murders that Christians have committed are brought up, Christians are quick to deny responsibility. They will say that people who did this were not "true" Christians. According to the proposition of "original sin" why shouldn't every Christian be held personally responsible for the millions of Jewish men, women, and children murdered by Christians as the result of the anti-Judaism taught by the Christian religion? I'm not sure they are not responsible, even in the absence of this doctrine, because by continuing Christian religion they are making it possible for the anti-Jewish lies and persecution of Jews to reoccur again and again.

According to the Christian Writings, Jesus is not without sin (biblical sin) by his own definition. One must also ask why he participated in a baptism for sins if he had none. Yeshua says that he did not come to all, not to gentiles, and not to the righteous, but only sinners in an attempt to return them to the Torah. This is hardly the cosmic savior sought in Christianity.

But the most glaring problem concerning dualism and original sin mythology is that it overlooks the truth that God is not our enemy and He has no gods in competition with Him. Our struggles are against our desires in disregard for God and the rest of humanity.

Adoption

Ebionite belief also rejects the idea of a Spirit Person of a so-called trinity, or ideas that allow "spirit-possession" as explanation for Yeshua's anointing. The anointing amounts to nothing more than the belief that God was approving Yeshua as a prophet with a true message with special favor. He was stepping into a position of an obedient son. Was Yeshua aware of this favor? We hold that Yeshua was so conscious of Yahweh and His Purpose that he was filled, if not consumed, with this consciousness. He emanated this constant presence of God's power. He saw Yahweh as his "Father" to describe his wish to be totally devoted to God and familiar with His Purpose. Variant texts found in early manuscripts reflect the belief that it was believed that Yeshua was "adopted" by God, as just described (Ehrman: 1993, chapter 2).

He was not unique in this. The charismatic sages Ḥanina ben Dosa, Ḥoni, and also Rabbi Meir have reports of them being a "son" of God. Ḥoni speaks of the Father (*'Abba*) on close terms, and the *Bat Qol* is spoken of in relation to Ḥanina. The Bat Qol, or *daughter of a voice*, is a term for a heavenly voice in rabbinic literature just as the one heard concerning Yeshua (Vermes: 1973, 192-213). Yet, in pagan thought, an august ruler was also considered to be a "Son of God." Pagan gods were also often sons of the high god.

There are beliefs that consider a pre-existent "Christ" that reappears in history, first as Adam, then Eliyah, others, and finally Yeshua. Such ideas are found in reincarnation or *metempsychosis* (*gillul* in qabbalistic literature). Supposedly a spirit being, the spirit (of Messiah) enters the world as a man or into a man, possessing him. This spirit is assigned to be the holy spirit, the archangel Michael, Metatron ("the lesser Yahweh" "within the throne"), the first creation, or even the creator of the physical world (*demiurge*). Late second temple beliefs in "powers and principalities" from Enoch and other pseudepigraphic writings (influenced by pagan religion), the Dead Sea Scrolls, or Philo are used to attribute Gnostic style background for the followers of Yeshua (for example, Epiphanius jumbled various non-Pauline communities with Gnostic tendencies and incorrectly categorized them all as Ebionite). Possession theology compromises the importance of the free will of man, perhaps amounts to spirit possession of the man Yeshua by a pre-existent "messiah being," pushing the human Yeshua into the background as its host.

This is at odds with Hippolytus' statement concerning Ebionite belief that, "For if even any other had fulfilled the commandments (contained) in the law, he would have been that Christ," also seems to exclude the idea of a single pre-existent Christ among Ebionites, especially since there is the possibility of multiple simultaneous "christs."

Making Yeshua a receptacle for another being, from heaven no less, or making him an incarnation of God, is an attempt to posit some unquestionable authority for him, or more specifically his supposed deputees (i.e., a church hierarchy). Such authority is only needed to usurp another authority, in this case the authority of a gentile church that wished to supersede a Jewish religion defined by the Torah. Christianity is a statement of rejection of the biblical Hebrew faith as defective, needing to be discarded for an alleged new and better gentile version of that religion. The revelation of Sinai needed to be contested by an equally divine revelation, an incarnation of God versus God, in order to validate the new religion.

We reject the idea that there is a "Holy Spirit" being as a person in a trinity awaiting a human host. The spirit of God permeates the universe and we can acknowledge it or not. That is why Hippolytus reports that Ebionites allowed that more than one person had the ability to be anointed with holy spirit. We all can attain the same consciousness of God, that holy spirituality that Yeshua achieved. When that happens we will be experiencing the Reign of God on a worldwide level.

For us, ideas of possession serve no practical or beneficial purpose; they do not advance Yeshua's own moral reform teachings. Some may use speculation and sensational explanations to draw adherents toward Yeshua's teachings, but the teachings stand on their own merit. We can look in any number of religions to find figures of magical origin, celestial station, incarnated divinity, supernatural feats, and signs to awe mankind. If this is the standard sought, Yeshua is quickly outclassed. But if Yeshua is simply a man who through his faith in the God of Israel opened his soul to the power of Yahweh waiting to fill us all, and sought Him with all his heart, mind, and soul to resist selfishness and sin, bringing men to repentance, then he is able to serve as an example for us to do the same. To the Ebionite, his humanity far exceeds myth, magic, and signs.

It is believed that Israelite kings were installed in enthronement ceremonies as a son of God via "adoption." Psalm 2, from where "You are my son; this day I have begotten you." comes, is one of the *royal psalms* which talk about enthronement, and other kingly events (identified by Hermann Gunkel as psalms 2, 18, 20, 21, 45, 72, 101, 132, 144.1-11. 1933, pp. 140-71). It talks of the adoption of David and Davidic kings which were human, not divine.

To believe that Yeshua was anointed as a man with a special relationship with God, a thoroughly righteous man, a prophet, a king, or to hope that he would be the eschatological Messiah (or even someday in the future) is not a heretical belief in Yahwism. Such claims must stand up to scrutiny. But to believe that the messiah (any messiah), or any man is God incarnate is a heretical and unfortunate misunderstanding.

A Modern Messiah?

There are Hasidic Jews who provide an interesting parallel to the more mystical, mythological viewpoints concerning the Messiah, which are reminiscent of Christian beliefs. These are fringe beliefs and not accepted at all by the great majority of Jews.

> A scathing critique of Chabad messianism has recently been published by Rabbi David Berger, as *The Rebbe, the Messiah, and the Scandal of Orthodox Indifference* (Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2001). Berger critiques Chabad messianism on a number of issues. Traditional rabbinic Judaism believes that the Messiah must temporally redeem the Jewish people, rebuild the temple, and bring universal peace and recognition of the God of Israel. As Berger notes, “a substantial majority of a highly significant Orthodox movement called Lubavitch or Chabad Hassidism affirms that the Lubavitcher Rebbe …Schneerson, who was laid to rest in 1994 without leaving a successor, did everything [mentioned above] … and will soon return to complete the redemption in his capacity as the Messiah.”
>
> In this the Chabad Messianists closely parallel Christians, believing a second coming of Schneerson will fulfill messianic expectations.

According to Berger, some Chabad Messianists also believe that Schneerson is an incarnation of God: "The supremely righteous, of whom the Rebbe [Schneerson] and Moses are the chief exemplars, annul their own essence to the point where their entire Essence is that of God. It is permissible to bow to them with this understanding. For this reason, the Rebbe is omniscient, omnipotent, and entirely without limits. He is 'indistinguishable' from God. Because he is a transparent window for pure divinity, a 'man-God,' 'when you speak to him, you speak to God.'

-(Interview given to the Jerusalem Post, 2001/10/19) http://www.ldsmag.com/ideas/050328modern.html)

Schneerson instituted a system of "mitzvah campaigns" called *mivtzoim*; these encouraged Jews to be keep kosher, observe Shabbat, learn more Torah, help in writing a Torah scroll, taught women to observe the *niddah* laws of Jewish family purity (laws pertaining to menstruation and ritual immersion afterwards in a pool of water known as a *mikveh*), accepting a belief in Moshiach (the Jewish Messiah). They went out to street-corners, and rode in "Mitzvah tanks," mobile outreach centers, encouraging Jews to increase their religious observance. He also launched a campaign to promote observance of the Noahide Laws among gentiles.

Schneerson's activities spread to many surprising parts of Judaism. Since the time of the *Rebbe* Sholom Dovber Schneersohn, Chabad had been involved with the Sephardic world. Schneerson was revered by Rabbis Israel Abuchatzirah (known as *Babba Sali*), Meir Abuchatzirah, Yitzchak Kaduri and Mordechai Eliyahu (a former Chief Rabbi of Israel). The latter two often visited him in Brooklyn, while the others maintained a correspondence with him. In the late 1970s, Schneerson joined with other organizations to orchestrate an exodus of Jews from countries such as Iran, laying the framework for Sephardic Hasidim. There are currently several Sephardic Chabad congregations.

Scientists who called on him, such as Herman Baranover, professor of physics at Ben-Gurion University in Beer-Sheva, Israel, noted that he had a keen understanding of scientific issues. Baranover himself, a Russian-Israeli authority on solar energy, is an active member of the Lubavitch movement. He frequently turned to Schneerson for advice on his scientific research. According to the billionaire mining magnate Joseph Gutnick of Australia, it was Schneerson who pointed out to him the precise geological points on a map of Australia to commence mining for gold. He was also given guidelines in his search for diamonds. Gutnick was subsequently appointed by Schneerson as his main representative to the Israeli government, and was instrumental in the election of Benjamin Netanyahu as prime minister of Israel in 1996.

Schneerson rarely chose to involve himself with questions of *halakha* (Jewish law)….

…Hasidism has been charged by other Orthodox Jews with creating a cult of personality since its inception. These charges resurfaced with greater intensity as Schneerson's influence increased. His followers had an extremely high level of devotion to him; they believed that he was infallible, and many proclaimed that he was the messiah. They believed implicitly in his vision, that he had supernatural powers of insight, "prophecy", and powers to change the world.

Schneerson's death was a major event in Orthodox Judaism. Many of Chabad's opponents were unsure of what would become of the movement without its head. Some Chabad Hasidim were thrown into shock and disbelief. Others were disillusioned. Yet others proclaimed that it barely mattered. Those that were accustomed to "believing" that he was the "Messiah," postulated that another "step" in the drama of Messianic redemption had been played out, and that their leader would soon return to redeem the world. During the funeral procession many Chabad Hasidim cried, but some danced in joy at what they believed was the signal of the "messianic age," which they stated would certainly appear within a "few hours", if not a "few days". Hours and days passed and nothing happened. Many of his followers are still waiting for him to appear. As the number of Chabad Hasidim is difficult to estimate, and no formal surveys have ever been conducted, it is virtually impossible to guess how people reacted in the long run. Some Hasidim openly declared that Schneerson had not, in fact, "died" at all; some saying that he had "shed his mortal body" or that he was "in hiding," waiting for an appropriate time to "reveal himself", in keeping with some of Schneerson's interpretations of Kabbalah (Jewish mysticism) that he articulated after the passing of Joseph Isaac Schneersohn.

This has caused a small part of the Jewish community to renew their denouncements of Chabad as being outside the pale of Judaism altogether. A few Orthodox rabbis, especially those associated with Lithuanian Judaism teach that Chabad is effectively becoming a new "religion", similar in its development to Christianity. The Lubavitch however, continue to lead a very strict Orthodox life-styles adhering to their strict application of the *Shulkhan Arukh* (code of law) and *halakha*. Opposition has not stymied the Lubavitchers; it has hardened their resolve to fulfil their rebbe's mission of ushering in the "messianic age".

-http://www.answers.com/topic/menachem-mendel-schneerson

To be fair, the Lubavitch Habad organization is a dynamic group who has been successful in restoring many Jews around the world to a rabbinically observant life. They claim Berger's accusations are without merit concerning any abandonment of Judaism.

When Scripture is mystically reinterpreted (Qabbalah), allegorized (New Testament), or compromised with non-Yahwistic thought (Christianity, paganism), we see the rise of such sects just as it brought the rise of Christianity. The study of Schneerson messianics should be seen as an important tool to look at early Christianity. Perhaps there will be a non-Jewish reinterpretation of the Schneerson phenomenon, with a gentile reinterpretation. But Menachem Schneerson was not the Messiah, and neither was Yeshua, in the way defined by Chabad or Christianity.

We can never be totally sure of what claims Yeshua made concerning himself, and what others claimed later. Isn't it similar? In the Bible there are prophets who acted as mouthpieces of God, speaking by the authority based on the parameters Torah. It is very disturbing to hear of men who "annul" their own personality to take on the divine nature of God, to speak as God, to be "indistinguishable" from God, whether it is Menachem Schneerson or Yeshua. Isn't this another form of spirit possession where the free will and individuality departs, perhaps losing one's soul to become a host? But the Ebionite belief is that Yeshua did not make such claims that allows Christianity to create its Christ, in spite of Yeshua's desire or success to be in agreement with God. If, in fact, it can be proven he did, then he is false and not to be followed in any way. Ebionites can find theological and spiritual comfort and justification without Yeshua. Our goal is to free Yeshua from the Christian system—in effect, to save him, and not the other way round.

Mysticism, Speculation, and Missionaries

Christians began with a mystical reinterpretation of scripture. Influenced by ambiguous references in the Bible possibly reflecting pagan mythology or symbolism, they looked to pagan ideas of the time to buttress their new religion. Jewish mysticism based on the same passages and pagan beliefs along with Gnostic dualism would eventually seem to promote Christian claims. During the Renaissance Christians sought to study Hebrew, and then Qabbalah, with the intent of showing Jesus to be the Messiah. Christian missionaries today continue to use mystical writings and the Talmud to "prove" that Jesus is the Messiah (yet have condemned the Talmud in the same breath) and divine! Ebionites do not hold to the orthodox explanation of oral Torah as divinely given or authoritative and view mystical writings with skepticism.

The Talmud and Other Rabbinic Writings: A Brief Introduction

This will be a very limited discussion to introduce the reader to the subject and issues. But there are references to the literature of the rabbis and the issues throughout the book. A good introduction to rabbinic literature is John Bowker's *The Targums and Rabbinic Literature* (Bowker: 1969).

Yahwism according to the rabbinic view, called Rabbinic Judaism, is a product of traditional interpretation (or clarification) of the Torah given to Moshe, according to orthodox thinking, handed down from sage to sage orally, but originating at the same time as the "written Torah" found in the Scriptures. To the rabbinic Jew, Torah means both the torah *sh'b'al peh* (that orally handed down), as well as the Torah *sh'biktav* (the written Torah). Regardless of actual origin, we know that some of these oral traditions were held as authoritative by some Jews, particularly the Pharisees, at the time Christian stories of Yeshua began to be recorded. Often the proponents of oral torah are seen as opponents of Yeshua's teaching concerning written Torah, although we cannot be sure how accurately these incidents reflect real conflicts between Yeshua and other teachers, or rather later Yeshuines and a dominant Pharisee religious presence after the the destruction of Jerusalem. This Pharisee dominance provided the foundation of Rabbinic Judaism.

The oral tradition is the natural development of Yahwism in interaction with a changing world, and Torah. Using Scripture as the base, and the god-given gift of intellect, Jewish scholars worked to keep Torah pertinent through reason (*pilpul*) yet looking for the solution in the Torah, as it is seen as the eternal revelation of God to Israel for all time. The solutions are intrinsic to that revelation to be discovered and handed down by successive sages who elaborate on the Torah to the next generation of sages who do likewise, resting their decisions on the authority of previous sages.

> Moses received Torah at Sinai and handed it on to Joshua, Joshua to the elders, and elders to prophets. And prophets handed it on to the men of the great assembly. They said three things: "Be prudent in judgement. Raise up many disciples. Make a fence for the Torah.

These judgements arrived at by the sages, *halakah* (alluding to *walking* in Torah) make up the body of writings called *mishnah*. The Mishnah can be considered of canonical status in Rabbinic Judaism. After the Mishnah reached this status it became central for other works rather than works directly interpreting Scripture. The Mishnah itself indicates that its materials were orally transmitted and memorized. But it and related works were not committed to writing in edited, fixed form until centuries after Yeshua, and perhaps in the matrix of a largely Christian society (Neusner: 1986). To reject the authority of the accepted opinions of the sages is the gravest of offenses. This lies behind some conflicts the rabbis had with Yeshua (although some of the accusations of the rabbis derive more from conflicts with later Christianity).

Rabbi Yehudah Ha-Nasi and his colleagues edited the Mishnah around 200 CE at Yavneh in Roman Palestine to preserve Jewish civilization after successive failures of Jewish revolts against Rome and destruction of Jerusalem. 63 tractates of rulings are given in six divisions of subject matter, repeating and expanding biblical law, and adding new legal areas only loosely related to the Bible. They include:

Zera'im- "Seeds" on agricultural matters	Nezikim- "Damages" on legal process
Mo'edim- "Appointed Times"	Qodashim- "Holy Things"
Nashim- "Women"	Taharot- "Purities"

The *Tosefta* (Addition) parallels the Mishnah in a supplemental way, sometimes presenting a tradition contradictory to the Mishnah. It probably comes from the 3rd or 4th century CE.

The *Talmud* is a collection of *halakah*, and *hagaddah* (which includes every type of information in the form of a commentary from every source available at the time of its composition and editing), that is, *mishnah* and *gemara*. Some of the information is scientific in nature, but some esoteric, folkloric, and also reports pagan customs and learning. Based on the *mishnah* (the *halakah* portion) other haggadic material, *gemara*, was added to complete it with comments. The Talmud exists in two versions, one coming from the Jews of Babylon (*Talmud Bavli*), and one from Israel (actually Jews from the city of Tiberias), called *Talmud Yerushalmi* (or the Jerusalem or Palestinian Talmud). The Yerushalmi was committed to writing in the 400s CE, and the Yerushalmi in the 500s with some later editing. A *baraita* is information from other scholarly traditions on the mishnah which can also now be found in the Talmud. The *Tosefta* (Tosefata) could be considered a separate collection of baraitas.

Midrash is a type of biblical exegesis that is similar to hagaddah although some material is halakic. It tries to interpret, and clarify peculiar or obscure words and passages, but also relates the Bible to the needs and practices of Jewish readers (or hearers). Much of the material is mysticism, folklore and legend and some predates the Mishnah. Here is an example speaking of the *yetzer tov* and *yetzer ra'*, the two inclinations in man.

> "And God saw all that He had made, and found it very good. And there was evening, and there was morning, the sixth day." (Genesis 1:31) - Midrash: *Rabbi Nahman said in Rabbi Samuel's name: "Behold, it was very good" refers to the Good Desire; "And behold, it was very good" refers to the Evil Desire. Can then the Evil Desire be very good? That would be extraordinary! But without the Evil Desire, however, no man would build a house, take a wife and beget children; and thus said Solomon: "Again, I considered all labour and all excelling in work, that it is a man's rivalry with his neighbour." (Kohelet IV, 4)*
>
> *-Genesis Rabbah 9:7, Soncino version*

Midrashim includes a long list of works, including the earlier (Tannaitic) *Mekhilta* (of Rabbi Ishmael, and of Simeon ben Yoḥai), *Sifre*, *Sifra*, *Sifre Zutta*, the post-Talmudic *Pesiqta*, *Tanḥuma* (or *Yelammedenu*), *Yalkut Shimoni*, Midrash Rabbah collections, and others.

Targums are Aramaic renderings of the Hebrew Bible that include glosses and paraphrase strongly reflecting ideas in vogue at the time. They include *Targum Onqelos*, *Targum Y'honatan* (Jonathan), and *Targum Neofiti*. Here is an example of a passage considered messianic from Targum Jonathan based on Habakkuk 3.17-18:

> For the kingdom of Babylon shall not endure, nor will it exercise dominion over Israel. The kings of Media shall be slain, and the mighty ones of Greece shall not succeed. The Romans shall be destroyed, and shall not levy the tax from Jerusalem.
>
> Then, in consequence of the miracle and deliverance which Thou shalt perform for Thy Messiah and for the remnant of Thy people who remain they shall give thanks thus, says the prophet: "I take joy in the Memra of the Lord, I rejoice in God, who accomplishes my deliverance."

This Targum is taken from Levey (1974: p. 95). This is an example of widely known Jewish writing which talks of the Messiah often, yet relatively few Jews ever considered a possibility of Yeshua being that Messiah. Still for this verse (18) and others the Latin Vulgate purposely reads Yeshua into it, against the actual text of even the text of the Targum by perverting the Hebrew as "*ego autem in Domino gaudebo exultabo in Deo Iesu meo*. —I will rejoice in the Lord, I will exult in my god Jesus" from the original "in the God of my deliverance (*bēlōhēy yišʿî*)." Such is the desperation to fabricate a case for the Christian Jesus as Christ claim in not only rabbinic literature, but in Christian translations as well.

The Vulgate was the official Bible of Christianity until the Reformation (i.e., for over a thousand years) and Protestants began producing their own versions. But the Protestants used the Vulgate as a base for their work, including the "King James Version" idolized by many fanatical denominations of fundamentalist Christianity. The Vulgate is still the Bible of traditional Catholicism.

Although we cite rabbinic literature in this book, it is not an indication that we believe it to be authoritative, just as we look at the Christian writings without accepting them as authoritative. Yet both bodies of ancient literature can be analyzed for the history of thought they represent, and information that can, in cases by comparison, tie them to historical events and places.

Missionaries often use citations from rabbinic literature (usually *hagaddic* or *midrashic*) as cryptic references to their own doctrines concerning Yeshua's alleged messiahship and divinity. (Yet the vast majority of these writings came into being long after Yeshua and was created by scholars living under Christian domination!) Their efforts are toward Orthodox Jews who accept this literature as authoritative and so if such Jews can see "Jesus" in their own authoritative sources, they must concede to a belief in Christianity's god. By converting the most "orthodox" of Jews to Christianity it is believed that other rabbinic Jews will fill the Church.

This is nothing new. Particularly during the late Middle Ages every effort was summoned to convert Jews whether by disputation, torture, or forced baptism. Our Hebrew text for a version of Matthew (*Shem Tov*) comes from a Jewish work written to combat Christian claims in the disputations called the *Touchstone* (*Even Boḥan*).

Just as in modern times, the Talmud was condemned but simultaneously used to convert Jews. The Dominican leader, Raymund de Penaforte was a proponent for the mass destruction of Talmuds occurring in 1242, and also opened schools to train mendicant friars in Hebrew to convince Jews of Christian "truth" through their own literature. He set the stage for the great disputation of 1263 under the auspices of King James of Aragon at Barcelona between Dominicans and Rabbi Nachman based on charges of blasphemy against the Christian god in the Talmud. Yet they would use the Talmud to reveal Christianity as true. During this disputation Nachman asks, "Why should the Talmud be thought to contain Christian doctrine? Why did the rabbis remain Jews if they were the purveyors of Christian ideas?" (Wang: 2001, p. 24).

Christian missionaries continue to use obscure references from rabbinic writings again and again over the centuries while the rabbis fail to see the secret doctrines Christians claim are there.

The Christian answer is that Jews are under the influence of Satan, and refuse to admit the "truth of Christianity." And such is the basis on which Christianity can justify any treatment it can imagine—slander, discrimination, harassment, torture, murder, and genocide—against the People of God.

The Ebionite answer is that any writings claiming a man to be a god are nonsense whether they are Jewish or Christian. We do not believe that there are supports for such idolatry in the Talmud.

Mystical Writings and Qabbalah:
The Complexity of Paganism

For many years scholars have been aware of the pagan influence and syncretism in the development of Christianity. The constant reform activities and the self-conscious efforts to eliminate pagan vestiges within Christianity itself point to this.

Some scholars also see similar processes in the development of Yahwism.

To "discover" that Israelites had originated in a pagan (non-Yahwistic) culture, that Israel had trouble with its own polytheistic, pagan tendencies, apostacy, and syncretism is disingenuous. The Tanak records all of this! To look at these incidents as digressions of Israel to its more "primitive" polytheistic past is misguided for the simple reason that polytheism is not primitive. In fact, what we regard as paganism, which includes polytheism, could be interpreted as intellectually ambitious, intuitive, and perhaps proto-scientific. This is especially so if we consider that much of "paganism" is based of astral and natural observance, and that the gods familiar to us from antiquity are personifications of such phenomena. Planets were gods, and later archons. The awesome sea and rivers seemed to have their own intelligence, the seasons, sun, moon, and stars an order, and the earth required special treatment to give its harvest. The powers of the universe of man were observed, studied, interpreted, and described by the means available whether as pictograms, standing stones, architecture, or writing systems. However primitive to us, the ancient shamans and magicians were forerunners to our doctors who work with sound, drugs, and light. In late antiquity, the Gnostics were looking at light and matter in the cosmos, human origins and existence, and integrating ancient scientific knowledge in a spiritual synthesis. This overwhelmed the minds of the ancients, and still fascinates moderns. What is the distance, for example, between magical stones and crystals and optics and lasers? The men who built Stonehenge and the pyramids were not unsophisticated fools. Paganism is an attempt to exist, understand, and even manipulate nature and reality for human benefit. And in the human experience this is more normal, in regard to history and time, than monotheism.

The difference in paganism (and I do understand that "pagan" is an catchphrase for a more complex reality) and Yahwistic monotheism is the place of man in the universe, particularly in relation to his fellow man. This is not an objective, scientific idea but a subjective, socio-religious idea that does not try to imitate the universal order ritually, and reasonably.

Because of the validity that can be found in paganism (and other interpretations based on natural order), Yahwists too have been drawn to paganism /polytheism, magic, and its latter incarnation, science. Although Yahwism tries to look beyond nature (the created) to the cause (creator) and socially beyond hierarchies (that imitate natural order), Yahwists tend to be rationalists and they are enticed by mysteries to solve and even manipulate just as their non-Yahwistic brothers are.

In the age of tribal and national gods, for Yahwists, Yahweh was the tribal god transcending the gods of others. Other gods are seen as competitors just as peoples were, or as assistant underlings, and finally as no-gods and carved things. Eventually they became spirits and demons, or the arch-demon—as a reflection of Israel's understanding of themselves in relationship to other peoples, gods, and religions of the time.

From these interactions with non-Yahwists and pre-Yahwistic heritage (after all, Yahwism is a reaction to paganism and a pagan past) we see semi-pagan creation stories; ancient legends from Mesopotamia reinterpreted (Noah, Babel, etc.); temple architecture; winged creatures strangely like those seen in Egypt, Syria, and Mesopotamia; geography; and later apocalypticism, and dualism in the Bible. Israel writes from the language of ideas of the times. And while there are not likely

to be multi-winged heavenly or demonic creatures any more than hell and horny devils, gods and goddesses, there is a single God of justice in Yahwism, and all the rest are dated props reissued to make that point.

Jews are aware that the Bible tells on us directly and indirectly, yet we strive for the single God and His justice expressed in Torah. But there have been bodies of knowledge among Jews lying to close to the border of Yahwism and that outside its clear expression. Until relatively late antiquity Jews had no restrictive "doctrine" except perhaps the *Sh'ma* (Deu 6.4 ff., declaring monotheism) and the *Sh'moneh Esreh* ("*Eighteen* Benedictions"). This left Jewish minds open somewhat to non-biblical thought, just as they are to science and speculation today. Such knowledge and speculation grew into a body of literature that accommodates pagan ideas, magic, and proto-science. When this knowledge is used as a motivation, aid, or rationale for ritual experiments, ecstatic experiences (or visions), meditation, symbolic systems, esoteric doctrines, etc., we might call this mysticism. It looks to explain the same questions asked by non-Yahwists, sometimes using the same techniques and devices, and in ways could be seen as ecumenical religion shared by Yahwists and non-Yahwists. Sometimes the writings appear more non-Yahwistic than Yahwistic, and sometimes can be interpreted non-Yahwistically regardless of the perspective and goal of the author. This is why Jews have traditionally put limitations on the study of certain writings and preferred to keep it hidden from gentiles; moreover, Jews who study such literature and pursue mystical paths are also very ritually observant in the rabbinic *halakah* as a firm base "in this world."

Israel's Struggle with Paganism

Much is made on Israel's uniqueness in the world of religions, and there are important differences. But the Yahwistic religion came about in a pagan matrix. Whether Yahwism is totally defined and fully formed in the Sinai revelation or it is the product of long development culminating after the Exile, we cannot ignore the physical and literary evidence of the worship of other gods and what we describe now as pagan concepts. Some of the evidence is ambiguous; some of it is folkloric in nature reflecting Ancient Near Eastern thought directly or indirectly, some involves attributes commonly employed for ancient gods reapplied as attributes of Yahweh. There is a relationship in the ancient world between Mesopotamia, Canaan, Israel, and the Greek world in which the powers of nature are renamed, modified, or reconceived. Anu and Marduk become 'El and Ba'l, El/Baal/Yahweh, or Kronus and Zeus; Tiamat becomes Yamm, Tehom, Rahab; and so forth. In describing such evidence some scholars posit a theory of Israelite history in which more Yahwistic peoples merged with native populations who were typically Canaanite, and familiar with the epics and theology, which we have learned from the clay tablets, found at Ugarit. The language of Ugarit and presumably other Canaanite cities is related to Hebrew (both designated as Northwest Semitic). The Bible itself reports apostacy within Israel throughout its history.

Because of the similarity of language used in both Canaanite and Hebrew literature, particularly words like *'el* (ʾl), *ba`al* (bʿl), *'elyon* (ʾlyn), and others, a case can be made by some that Israel, or some segment of Israelite society started as Canaanites, both culturally and theologically. Baal is now known to have been a divine name before 2600 BCE, and has been found at Ebla and Mari (Pettinato: 1980). Like Canaanites, the Hebrews thought of little concerning an afterlife other than going down to the land of shades, the pit (*šʾʾôl*) where they expected a "life" of darkness writhing in swampy slime, or as ghosts (the speculations changed as time went on). The world was floating within a primeval sea and on the waters beneath, with the vaulted ceiling of the skies above. The high god was thought to be found on a high mountain to the north, described as riding the storm clouds; although, presiding over a council of lesser gods, sons, or "angels" attending to other matters. And this last similarity is what concerns us especially.

In Psalm 82.1 we read:

> God standeth in the congregation of God; in the midst of the judges He judgeth *(JPS 1917)*

A more literal translation might run: God (*ʾĕlōhîm*) stands in the council of God (*ʿăḏaṯ ʾēl*), He presides in the midst of gods (*ʾĕlōhîm*). Biblical scholar, Frank Moore Cross says that:

> "Some have suggested that the expression *ʿădat ʾĒl* in Psalm 82:1 be taken as "the council of ʾĒl," and the poem read to mean that Yahweh (revised to *ʾĕlōhîm* in the 'Elohistic Psalter) stood in ʾĒl 's council. I doubt this is so and would place the passage among those in early poetry where *ʾĒl* is clearly regarded as a proper name of Yahweh. However, there can be no doubt that the origin of

the designation *ʿădat ʾĒl* is in Canaanite myth. It appears at Ugarit in the form *ʿadatu ʾIli-ma* (*ʿdt ʾilm*), "council of *ʾĒl*." (Cross: 1973, 1997. pp. 44-45).

It is apparent that like the Canaanites (and others), Israelites did imagine a council of gods, or sons of God. Whether they were personifications of nature (or planets, stars), and whether some Israelites worshipped these as the "host of heaven" (*ṣᵊḇaʾ haššāmayim*, Deut 4.19; 2 Kgs 17.16), or saw them as powers subservient to Yahweh, the precedent would have later consequences theologically as "sons of God /*ʾĒl* and *ʾĕlōhîm*." Canaanite 'El was the divine father of sons of the council (*dār banī ʾili*, and other examples; see Cross: p.46) and chief in that council was the Lord (that is, *lord*, as it is the meaning of *ba'l*, and Hebrew ba`al; similarly, 'El is primarily a generic word meaning *god* /*God*). Most associated with the name *Hadad*, Ba`al was worshipped under various appellatives as a storm god (as was Zeus and Yahweh), such as, *Ba'l Tsefon* (the Lord of Ṣapṓn, a high mountain in the north which Greek sky/thunder god, Zeus Casius, was later associated); the active head of the pantheon at Ugarit who, in spite of his mountain home was god in control of ocean storms like the Greek Poseidon (Albright: 1968, p. 127-128). In some sources Ba'l was the son of *Dagan*, not 'El. Again, ancient gods were somewhat interchangeable because they represented powers in nature; similarly, manifestations of nature's power could be considered manifestations of the god.

At first 'El was the most high god, god of the heavens, of the Canaanite pantheon (yet was created by others), a distant fatherly god, procreating (thus "Bull 'El" who mated with goddesses in the form of cows) and sometimes exhibiting all too human faults, but content to tend his garden in his ancient years. Chief among his seventy sons was Ba'l who eventually became the foremost god and took on 'El's attributes, his wives, including his mother, Asherah (*Aṯirat*, also *'Elat =goddess*) (Coogan: 1978, p. 22). These gods were not static in their positions. It may be that 'El lost his prominence by the first part of the second millennium BCE, using the data from theophorous names on cuneiform tablets (Albright, *op. cit*.). A case has been made that in the same way, 'El was the older Hebrew god eventually supplanted by his son, Yahweh, linking the role of Yahweh with that of Canaanite Ba'l. And there are more than a few similarities (Coogan: pp. 75-85). But Yahweh came to be regarded more like 'El even among Israelites who held a Canaanite tainted Yahwism (as might seen from the now famous Kuntillet Arjud inscriptions mentioning Yahweh in conjunction with "his 'asherah /Asherah"—although the "picture" also found is quite graphic sexually, some are unconvinced that it is Asherah depicted, presumably as a consort (Tigay: n.d.; Freedman: 1987; *'asherah* as object rather than a goddess.)). But *'asherah* as object must have paralleled something like an altar, and instead of Yahweh mentioned with an asherah, Baal's altar (to be thrown down) is next to an *'asherah* (to be cut down) in Judges 6.25. Does this not illustrate a confusion between 'El, Ba'l, and finally Yahweh among some Israelites?

In the Bible, the sons of God also make up the heavenly council, but there the seventy Canaanite gods of 'El's council become angels, and Ba'l is replaced by Yahweh. In 1 Kings 22.19 we have a description of the heavenly court where he gets suggestions.

> I saw Yahweh, sitting upon his throne, and all the host of the heavens, standing by him, on his right hand, and on his left. [20]And Yahweh said, Who will persuade Ahab, that he may go up and fall, at Ramoth-gilead? And, one, said in this manner, and, another, said in that manner. [21]Then came forth a spirit, and stood before Yahweh, and said—I, will persuade him. [22]And Yahweh said unto him—Wherewith? And he said—I will go forth, and become a spirit of falsehood in the mouth of all his prophets,—So he said,—Thou mayest persuade, yea and prevail, go forth, and do so. [23]Now, therefore, lo! Yahweh hath suffered a spirit of falsehood to be put into the mouth of all these thy prophets.

Like the Canaanite divine council of 70 gods, much later in post-exilic popular Israelite religion, Yahweh's council also had 70 angels acting as guardians of the nations (3 Enoch 48; Tg. Yonatan Genesis 11; cp. Deut 4.19; 29.26). This might be based on the Bible's view of the 70 nations/peoples and tongues outside Israel (Gen 10). In this "pantheon" some would argue that before monotheistic reform, there was the high god 'El Elyon, angels, and the chief spokesman, angel Yahweh who was also called Angel of Yahweh. Supposedly people saw Yahweh, synonymous with this angel (cp. Judg 6.11-12 /6.22; the visitors of Gen 18; Hagar Gen 16; *et alia*) who is seen in the form of a man—against the teaching in Exodus 33.20 which says man cannot see Yahweh and live. Margaret Barker makes the argument that Israelites were like Canaanites, that Yahweh took a role similar to Baal, that he was a god that appeared on earth, that the early Christians accepted Jesus as Yahweh, the great angel as part of a long pagan Israelite faith and that this was normative religion

suppressed by a monotheistic (Yahweh Alone) party. She finds support in the Bible, mystical Jewish writings, Gnosticism, and the Christian writings (Barker: 1992). As odd as this sounds to the religious reader, it is no stranger than what Christianity contends for in its claims about Jesus. But she builds support from pagan religion and survivals of pagan religion found in these aforementioned sources. For her, Christianity represents the legitimate pre-monotheistic religion of Israel.

> Jesus was worshipped by his followers and hailed as the Son of God, Messiah and Lord. For centuries the Church has used these titles and they now mean something very important to millions of people. Scholars of the ancient texts, however, are less certain about them, and how it could been possible for monotheistic Jews to have *worshipped* Jesus. Here lies the great problem. Did the first Christians worship Jesus and what did they mean when they used these words to describe their beliefs about him? ….
>
> They were brought into Christian thought from a pagan background, it is said, and thus represented a later understanding of Jesus which became incorporated into the New Testament, or they were a paganized understanding of what had originally been Palestinian titles. The worship of Jesus cannot possibly have begun among the first Jewish Christians [sic] since their monotheism would have made such a practice unthinkable….
>
> What has become clear to me time and time again is that even so wide an area, the evidence points consistently in one direction and indicates that pre-Christian Judaism was not monotheistic in the sense that we use that word. The roots of Christian Trinitarian theology lie in pre-Christian Palestinian beliefs about angels. There were many in first-century Palestine who still retained a world-view derived from the more ancient religion of Israel in which there was a High God and several Sons of God, one of whom was Yahweh, the Holy One of Israel. Yahweh, the Lord, could be manifested on earth in human form, as an angel or in the Davidic king. *It was as a manifestation of Yahweh, the Son of God, that Jesus was acknowledged as Son of God, Messiah and Lord* (Barker: 1992, pp. 1-3).

For us, this condemns Christianity and pre-monotheistic religion because we are staunch monotheists, rejecting any such beliefs derived from paganism. But Barker establishes clearly that Christianity, in its claims of divinity for their Jesus, is derived (in part at least) from that strain of religion in ancient Israel that followed after the Baals, and other aspects of Canaanite paganism that the Torah and the prophets of Yahwism condemned and failed to destroy.

Christianity is part of tradition of apostacy which paralleled Yahwism which plagued Israel's history and it has provided Christianity with ambiguous references to plural gods, God appearing in human form, angels and demons, etc. But if Christianity uses pagan supports for its doctrines, it hurts, not helps its case.

The other source for Christian missionaries has been Qabbalistic writings. Gershom Scholem traces the development of the mystical tradition in Judaism and the influence of Gnosticism and Hellenistic ideas (1978, pp. 8-26). From an eclectic syncretism, combining ideas from Jewish and pagan systems, later Christians would emphasize those needed to claim a revelation that Jesus was a god, Christ, and that secretly known to the rabbis. All that can be found is the resurgence of earlier mystical pagan ideas that crept into the thought and literature associated with qabbalah whether the authors and purveyors of qabbalah intended this or not.

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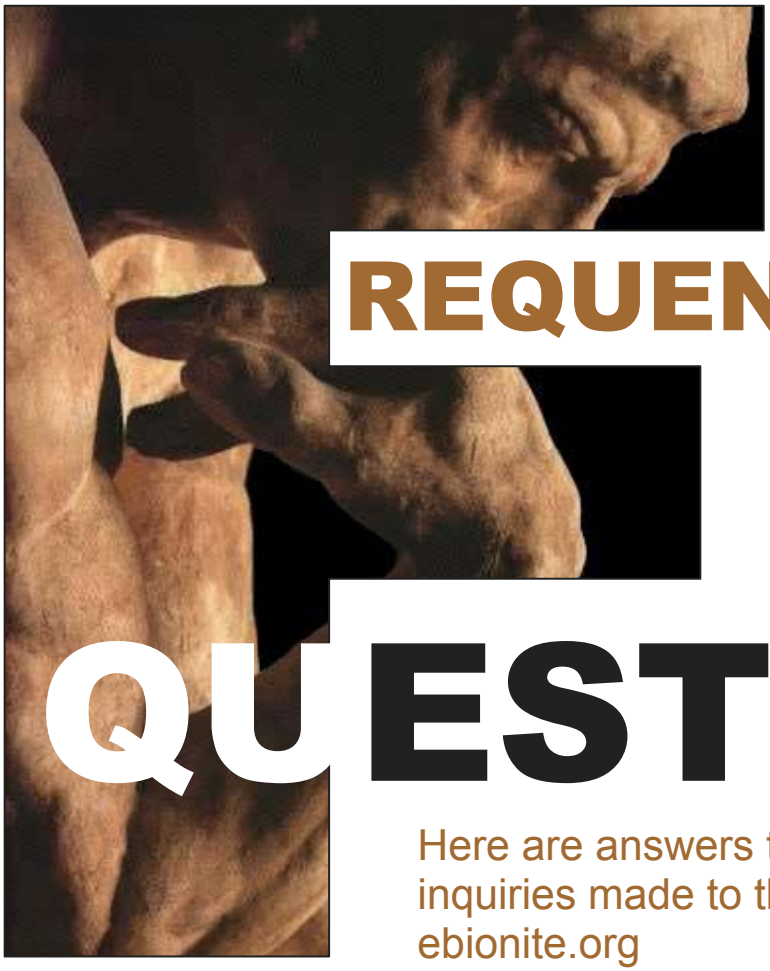


REQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Here are answers to some of the most common inquiries made to the Ebionite Community and ebionite.org

What are the goals of the Ebionites?
We have several related goals:

- The promotion of monotheistic Yahwism ("Judaism").
- The promotion of this to gentiles
- The restoration of the good name of Yeshua bar Yosef as a righteous Jew
- This necessitates the deconstruction of the mythological "Jesus" of Christianity, disproving that Christianity is a biblically related religion.
- Social justice based on honesty, and love in the context of the Bible (Tanak).

What the Ebionites are not. There are a number of Christian derived fringe groups who have misrepresented themselves as Ebionites. They are often "pentecostal" "non-denominational," "right-wing" conservative, anti-authority, or new age (hippie), and apocalyptic if not gnostic. They commandeer the name Ebionite to further another extremist agenda. Some of these groups maintain relations with other extremist groups, and began as extremist Christians. Their current incarnation is often just a modification of the former state. Ebionites are anti-authority only in the sense that YHWH alone is our authority, and His system of life is best and as long as government do not deliberately interfere it is superfluous. Coercion of any type is against what we feel to be the goal of all mankind to submit to God of their own accord. Ebionites make up a sovereign nation of people who live and cooperate within other nations as much as the Torah allows.

Don't be misled by others calling themselves Ebionites. The Ebionite Community represents the Ebionite faith today.

If you have questions concerning someone representing themselves as Ebionites, or the standing of a person to represent the Ebionite Jewish Community, contact us.

Are the Ebionites Jews? Judaism is a type of Yahwism that became highly developed subset of the Biblical religion described in the Hebrew Bible (called "Old Testament" by most Christians). It began in earnest a little before Christianity did. People of the tribe of Judah (Y'hudah) with remnants of other tribes of ancient Israel returned from captivity in Babylonia, and so Yahwism came to be represented by these returning Jews ("Yehudim").

In a broad sense, anyone practicing a version of ancient Yahwism today are referred to as "Jews," regardless of accuracy, and in that sense, Ebionites are a type of "Jew," but more specifically Ebionites are a type of Yahwist, embracing the ancient covenant of circumcision and covenant "Law."

There is no single type of Yahwism today. Most people are familiar with the "rabbinic" variety of Yahwism. But there are other varieties also, including the Evyonim.

Are the Ebionites Christians? We are in no way Christian or supportive of the Christian system. We consider Christianity to be a type of Mystery Religion devised by Paul of Tarsus and others. We believe that there is no relationship between Christianity (actually better described as *Paulism*) and the man Christians refer to as "Jesus." For that matter, since Christians often claim that "Christian" means Christ-like (that is like "Jesus"), it is most unfortunate that there are few, if any Christians who could honestly make that claim.

Some scholars categorize the ancient Ebionites as Christian or Jewish-Christian. That description is unjustified and untenable. In fact there is no such thing as a Jewish-Christian just as there are no Muslim-Christians. We use the word *Yeshuine* for all ancient Jewish people attempting to follow Yeshua.

Do Ebionites believe in Jesus? Depending on what you are actually asking, the answer varies. If you are of the fundamentalist Christian belief, I will save time for you, and say, No, we do not believe in Jesus. Your Graeco-Roman god Jesus bears no resemblance to our Yeshua.

Jews, and anyone who believes in the existence of God as presented by the Bible (Tanak) cannot possibly believe that there is more than one god; and believing that God was birthed from between the legs of a human mother and sacrificed himself to himself for another person's sins, dying, is not only absurd, but an insult to the intelligence God gives at least some humans. While such ideas appealed to the pagan Greeks and Romans, and other superstitious peoples who were raised on fables of gods having intercourse with mortal women to produce semi-divine offspring (to cover up the products of adulterous human affairs), covenant Jews would never accept such nonsense. Jews are able to handle only one God at a time.

Do Christians really believe in such things?!

On the other hand, from what can be reconstructed after demythologizing the gospel and removing the fabrications of later gentile scribes, Jesus can be seen as teaching many good things worthy of emulating. And this is what he himself asked his followers to concentrate on. He said it did not matter what honors they paid him if they did not follow his teachings. And his teachings were those of a Jew who was expecting the end of the world as Jews knew it, and hopefully the beginning of an age under the Jewish Messiah.

But truth be told, Jesus has been made into something very disgusting and pagan by Christians, and very dishonored by them. The closest religion to the teachings of Jesus has always been biblical Judaism, and embracing Judaism is the best way to embrace Jesus.

Was Jesus the Messiah? Jesus was not the Messiah according to the Christian definition. There is no Reign, no Kingdom of God on earth. Christians have a problem of putting emphasis on people, but it is a bad practice by anyone to put so much importance on an individual whether it be a Christian or Jewish sect. We feel that the important thing is every person's relationship to God and in the Messianic Age the best relationship will be realized for the entire world in a time of wisdom, peace, and the knowledge of Yahweh and His commandments. Jesus knew this and wanted to see this age come also.

He realized that the way to bring this age was to devotion to God and our fellow man and not in force of arms, strife and hate. Today most Jews believe that righteousness on the part of Israel will signify that mankind is ready for the Messianic Age, and speak of "bringing the Messiah." This is what Jesus wanted to do also. And so do we. And in that sense, the work of Jesus was messianic, and wherever he succeeded he was acting as a messiah---but was not the Messiah who actually began that Age. Yeshua as a claimant to the throne as king would have been anointed as all kings are, and in that sense he could be considered a messiah—but not in the way Christianity understands "Messiah." We believe that Yeshua was anointed by the spirit of God, and also eligible as the actual "King of the Jews" under whose leadership gentile rule would be ended and the nations subjugated to God. Instead Yeshua was killed, and his movement was perverted by Paul and others. The Reign did not come.

This was one of the problems Christians had with Ebionites in ancient times. They criticized us for the belief that anyone could be a messiah. They were fixated on an individual, not the Reign. They did not understand that Yahweh empowers individuals only in that they help bring His desires to fruition to aid His children. Jesus was empowered to try to convince people to look to God and repent and prepare for the Reign of God. Instead Christians made Jesus into an idol.

What is the historical basis for teachings of the Ebionite Movement? The basis for modern Evyonut is found in a number of ancient witnesses. The most important is the descriptions found for Ebionites in the writings of the Muslim historian Abd al-Jabbar, the Torah, the negative comments of Christian church fathers concerning the Ebionites, and information disguised in the Christian New Testament. They are further supported by historical Jesus studies which is rediscovering what the Ebionites have always known about Yeshua.

What does Evyonim mean? One of the Biblical Hebrew words for "poor," as also descriptive of a powerless, oppressed, humbled person, is *'evyon*. *'Evyonim* is the plural of *'evyon*. In ancient Israel there seems to have always been the matter of class and class victimization just as it exists today. There are the "haves" and the "have nots" who are often taken advantage of by the "upper class." Yeshua bar Yosef preached against the well-to-do who looked down on and oppressed those *'amey ha'aretz* "beneath" them. These same people were most often collaborators with the gentiles who occupied and corrupted the holy land. They made compromises with gentiles to relax the Torah, and in pursuit of wealth and power. With the Romans they bled the people dry, grinding them into abject poverty and without recourse except through religious personnel who acted as retainers to the powerful robbing the people. The Temple ministry itself was corrupt, allowing gentile contamination through pagan gifts and influence on priests and the high priests who were appointed by the Romans. In the midst of destitute people stood one of the greatest and extravagant buildings of the ancient world, a treasure house built with ill-gotten gain by a king more pagan than Jewish. Yeshua started a reform movement in Judaism based on social justice in a religious, Torah observant context. The followers of this movement later became identified as Evyonim/ Ebionites. Yet there were always 'evyonim in the social sense, and Yeshua drew on the experience of these people, reaching out to them as the core of his movement. The Ebionites today are continuing in this same approach to Yahwism. And we see the parallels between Yeshua's day and all subsequent days under the Romans and their like including the Christians.

Who is Yahshua? The man known to most as "Jesus of Nazareth" was, of course, a Jew. Jesus is not a Hebrew (Jewish) name, but an attempt to bring the sound of his Hebrew name across to Greek, Latin, English and other languages. Hebrew does not even have an English "j" sound (In modern Hebrew, foreign loanwords with that "j" sound must be represented with a "g" and a stroke next to it. Not only that, but "Jesus" was "Iesus" pronounced *yay-soos*, up through the time of the Authorized Version, or "KJV.") His name consists of two elements, as most Hebrew name do. The name of the Eternal, Yahweh in combination with the word *shu`a* meaning to *deliver* or *save*. This name has a number of forms, another being *Y'hoshu`a* or *Yehoshu`a (Yahw'shu`a?)*. Some prefer an Aramaic rendering, *Yeshua* or *Y'shua*. Some prefer Yahshua because it's easier to say and combining Yah(weh) with *shu`a* (or using Y'hoshua) has a different meaning than Yeshua (which can be construed as "he saves" used by Christians to say Jesus was God). Only God saves, not Jesus. But from what we now know of Hebrew and Aramaic usage at the time, the name his friends most likely used was Yeshu`a or Yeshu which is a "nickname" for Y'hoshu`a. We realize that Yeshua is a popular form to use today. Some avoid using *Yeshu`a* only because Christians have blasphemously contrived this mean that Yeshua, instead of God, is salvation. Most avoid Yeshu because of the acronym "Yesh"u" which stands for Yemaḥ Sh'mo Uzzikro "may his name be blotted out" in some Jewish polemics.

We prefer an originally Hebraic form like Yahshua, etc., to express that this man was Jewish in every way, and that his teachings, understandings, and god are not Western or Christian. It is all Hebrew, all Jewish, and very, very little of that has been understood. The name Yeshua or variations do not constitute a "sacred name" to distinguish "true believers" from others.

What is Yahwism? The religion of the Bible is based on covenant made with a single god. The god of Avraham, Isaac (Yiṣḥaq), and Jacob (Ya`aqov) who spoke to Moses (Moshe) describes Himself as YHWH. In many English (Christian) Bibles, He is represented by the word LORD. Yet the Hebrew letters this English word tries to represent is YHWH (the Hebrew letters yod-heh-waw-heh). Today most scholars vocalize this as *Yahweh*, and the short form of the name (Yah) can be seen in many biblical names, for example Yesha'yah ("Isaiah") and Eliyah ("Elijah"). The religion of belief in the Hebrew god, although He is the god of all and sustainer of all, can be referred to as *Yahwism*. For Ebionites Yahwism is a biblical system of life, expressed through God's commandments, and superior to all other systems.

Are Christians Yahwists? We do not believe that they are Yahwists. Yahwism calls for strict monotheism which totally excludes the possibility of Yahweh becoming a man or dying, or a trinity consisting of different parts or beings like a "father, son, holy ghost." The trinitarian belief is one originating in pagan religion. People who believe that "Jesus" is God or part of a triune god, or that there can even

be a triune god do not understand or accept Yahwism—that is they are not in the faith of the God of Israel, YHWH.

Yahwism is defined by Torah, a system within the commandments of God. It is not a system of Jews (Israel). It is a system set forth by God and Israel was given the opportunity to adopt that system as a light to all other peoples so all mankind would be drawn to that system. The Christian system is in opposition to God as it developed in to a rival, substitute system which undermines the key elements of Yahwism: monotheism, Torah, and free will. It claims it is superior to God's system and has even described and attacked those loyal to God as demonic, blind, and sub-human.

What is *pagan*? *Pagan* describes a religious practice or view not coming from the Bible (i.e., non-Yahwistic), and can describe people who embrace such things. We believe that such things are displeasing to Yahweh. Originally *pagan* was an old Latin word denoting a superstitious, ignorant, country person. (Most of us are "country" people, and we do not believe that the words "ignorant" and "country" are synonymous!)

What do you mean when you say Bible? When Ebionites say "Bible" they mean the *Tanakh*, what most call the "Old Testament." Tanak is an acronym of T, N, and K—is, the combination of the *Torah* (also called the Five Books of Moses, Pentateuch, or *Humash*), the *Nevi'im* (or, Prophets), and the *Ketuvim* (the Writings which include the Psalms, Proverbs, and others). The popular term currently is *The Hebrew Bible*, but is the sum total of the sacred scriptures. Another word used is *Mikra* (also *Miqra*).

It includes none of the writings that Christians have added to the Bible as their "New Testament." Actually, the first Christians used only the Bible (Tanakh) and did not have what they would call a "new testament" for centuries after Yeshua, although some writings that would be included in their book were circulated early on.

There can only be an "old" testament when someone invents a "new" one. And so that idea of an "old" testament is simply a Christian invention, and a devious invention at that. What Christians call the "Old Testament" is the only testament. We call only that testament the Bible.

Many Christians today resent the idea that the *Book of Mormon* is "another testament of Jesus Christ" and some see such an idea as a dangerous deception. The Ebionites see an addition of the so-called Christian *New Testament* to the Hebrew Bible in the same way many Christians would reject the idea that scripture should include the *Book of Mormon*. The *Book of Mormon* is not scripture, and neither is the Christian *New Testament* part of sacred scripture. Ebionites reject both of these erroneous works.

You don't care much for Christians, do you? Historically Christianity, supposedly a religion based on love, has murdered millions of people. These millions include not just Jews and others who refused to convert to Christianity, and those who dared stand in the way of Christian greed for power and territory, but Christians of rival sects as well. Ebionites continue to be persecuted by Christians today covertly and overtly in the United States and elsewhere. Personal experience says to trust Christians only at your own peril. Never assume that they will do the right, good, or just thing in their dealings.

Christianity has developed false values and goals which has enabled it to wreak this havoc with impunity, and claims it does it for God. It is not a good religion and it is not the religion of God. We refer to Christianity as *Dat Kazav* (or Daka). The Ebionites maintain the teachings of Yeshua ("Jesus"). Yet, the Ebionites were considered heretics by Christians and persecuted. This may be understandable since we do not consider Christianity to be the religion of Yeshua, but rather a faith in opposition to Yeshua—actually, a counterfeit version of the Yeshuine movement. Yeshua, as a king messiah of the Jews (Israel) who taught as a Jewish prophet the program of God's Reign, has been promoted as his own alter ego and against his messiahship within that role as defined by biblical thought. Using language more familiar to Christians, the *presentation of Yeshua in Christianity* as the "*Christian* Christ" is "anti-Christ" to the real Yeshua as teacher, prophet, and a rightful king messiah that Ebionites know and love.

We are as fearful and resistant to Christianity as Christians would be to living in a system in which they were persecuted. To see Christians masquerade as saints, speaking of Yeshua as if they knew him, mutilating our Scriptures as if they had a right to them all the while insulting the People of God, and using them to support a religion that parodies biblical faith, Jews, Yeshua, and God is infuriating.

Rather than killing Christians as they have Jews by the millions, we want all gentiles, including Christians, to come to know and worship the God of Israel (YHWH) and enter into covenant with Him. And our message to them is repent. This was the message of both "John" and "Jesus" to bring Jews into a new fullness of God's commandments which they were neglecting, and to gentiles who would become Jews in order to worship God.

The call of Yaḥḥanan and Yeshua was to draw men to God of their own free will, and in fact Jews (including Ebionites) have not instituted crusades, inquisitions, pogroms, massacres, public humiliations, trials and tortures, or holocausts, against others—as Christians have, mockingly, in the name of the Jew Jesus.

What is "Dat Kazav"? *Dat Kazav* (Lying Religion, or Religion of Falseness) is a Hebrew term found in the Dead Sea Scrolls Ebionites borrow to describe the Christian system that comes from the *'ish kazav* (Lying Man, i.e., Liar) Paul of Tarsus. *Daka* is an acronym of Dat Kazav. In Hebrew *daka* is also a verb meaning *to oppress*; *to victimize*; *to tyrannize*. We believe the Christian system to be a false one that seeks to replace the system of God, and also the real Yeshua, the Christian system being as a wolf in sheep's clothing.

Why do Jews believe in works instead of grace? They don't. This is a misrepresentation on the part of Christianity. Gentiles who had no intention of becoming Jews, yet wanted to devise a faith in the Jewish god, needed a rationale for doing so. Due to a Gnostic influence which said that the physical world was flawed and evil, the Pauline Christians rejected physical requirements like circumcision, and law keeping, and instead emphasized spirituality. In maintaining a Gnostic worldview they also demonized Jews, and some claimed that Yahweh was evil. Jesus was seen as the new spiritual god who had replaced Yahweh and physical Jewish religion. In other words, all the things Yahweh commanded the Hebrews to do, according to Gnostic thought, were physical and thus evil. God (in their minds, Jesus) could only be appeased by some spiritual act to remove them from the physical realm where sin (evil) ruled. Thus the Christian doctrine of works versus grace came about from the Gnostic doctrine of spiritual versus physical.

The letter of James (*'Iggeret Ya`aqov*) understands the true story. Faith without works are dead. This is and has been the Jewish teaching all along. Yahweh does not command us to believe anything, but on the other hand He instructs us to *do* many things and desist from many things in His Torah. How can we say we believe in Him if we reject or explain all these things out of existence? Yahweh shows His "grace," that is, His undeserved concern and mercy to all His creatures including all humans, and we acknowledge that grace as we observe His commandments.

Is there nothing evil? And what is Torah? Yes, there certainly is evil. But a better word is failure. Failure to live as we should. And we should live as Yahweh instructed us in His Torah.

Torah is often rendered "the Law" in English. The more accurate translation is *Instruction*. This Torah is the body of instructional laws given to Moses after the Israelites escaped from Egypt. These instructions have been enumerated to 613 laws stated positively (*you shall...*) and negatively (*you shall not...*).

Aren't there just 10 commandments God gives us? No place in the Bible are there only ten laws, although convenience would have us think so. But there is no such thing as "The Ten Commandments." In Hebrew ten *d'varim*, that is, ten *things*, *words*, *matters* are given. A good translation is the *Ten Principles*, because each act as categories in which all the other 603 commandments can be sorted into.

Think of each "law" of these ten categories as the tip of an iceberg visible above the water. So for the law "You must not murder." making the tip, you have other laws such as what to do with killers, how to deal with manslaughter and what constitutes premeditated murder, etc., making up the rest of the iceberg. But these ten are devices to easily understand the main points of many other laws related to them.

So although in many minds keeping the so-called "Ten Commandments" is a popular thing to promote, there are in fact more than just ten to keep. Unfortunately, these other commandments are often considered obscure and unnecessary---such as the dietary laws, laws against charging interest, and many other important laws—are ignored.

Do Jews keep 613 commandments? Not all the laws are still applicable because things they concerned no longer exist. For example, there is no temple and this voids a good number of laws at this present time. But Jews *try* to observe all of these laws they can. (Again, breaking a commandment is not some sort of offense requiring automatic eternal damnation. Commandments are ideals to strive for, and some have clear consequences in this world.)

Rabbinic Jews (led by rabbis) keep more than these. Over the years they have applied the laws given in the Bible to new situations that arise and have expanded them or have assigned special interpretations to them. Most claim that this *Oral Torah*, passed down rabbi to rabbi by mouth is also divinely inspired. So to Rabbinic Jews (the majority of Jews) there is a *Written Torah* and an *Oral Torah*, both being authoritative and binding. This body of Oral Torah can be found in the *Mishna* and the *Gemara* one being legal and the other traditional "folklore." Together they make up the *Talmud*. And so there are thousands of laws for rabbinic Jews and they are still growing.

On the other hand, there are groups of Jews who hold to only the literal information given in the Written Torah, i.e., the laws found in the Bible. The Qaraites and Ebionites are supporters of the Written Torah. They do not believe the Talmud to be authoritative.

The Ebionites do observe the Torah according to a bias toward compassion and mercy, and by the principle of *pikuah nefesh* (saving a life) which states a preference to

put saving a life over observing a commandment. This is because Yahweh says that *we are to live* by these commandments, not die by them. But we put the responsibility of observance of commandments upon individuals. The Torah is best kept when it is internalized, i.e., written on the heart.

Why do Ebionites avoid Christian meetings, and meetings made up of Christians (or other religions)? Ebionites avoid and have a religious right and duty to not attend any meeting or gathering that is led by a Christian or Christians (or other religions other than Judaism) and attended predominantly by Christians (or members of religions other than Judaism). These may be religious meetings, or public, or employment related particularly if you are a government employee. The governments of most nations reflect the whims of the majority, officially or unofficially. Thus the values and mores of the majority religion is given favor at the expense of the religious rights of minorities, including Jews. To attend such meetings can be construed as support of those majority values, mores, and thus the religion. An Ebionite will not support other religions in any measure, nor will it recognize any authority that rests upon the acknowledgement of another religion, even if it only means participating with gathered individuals who hold another religion.

In the past Jews have unwittingly attended such gatherings only to find out that the agenda of another religion is expressed overtly or covertly, feeling as if they were made to be a party to such agendas. An individual addressing the group may simply make a religious reference. But this is offensive because when that religious reference is made an Ebionite (or any Jew) cannot be sure what value system, or what god is being called upon. A prayer by a non-Jew might be offered, which would be extremely offensive. Food at such gatherings might be served prepared in an unclean way, or offered with a pagan prayer. To be in such a meeting puts us in a bad position where we would cause offense or even a commotion by showing disfavor for an action, and offended either intentionally or unintentionally. Therefore, it is best that we do not attend for all involved.

Why do Ebionites avoid prayer with non-Jews? Ebionites cannot pray to anyone or anything except the God of Israel, YHWH.

Some Ebionites will not pray publicly because they consider it to be a private communication with God, and not to be done as a display or "test" of loyalty. Public prayer such as "school prayer" is not true prayer but prayer perverted for religious or political "tests." Yeshua clearly taught the falseness of such displays.

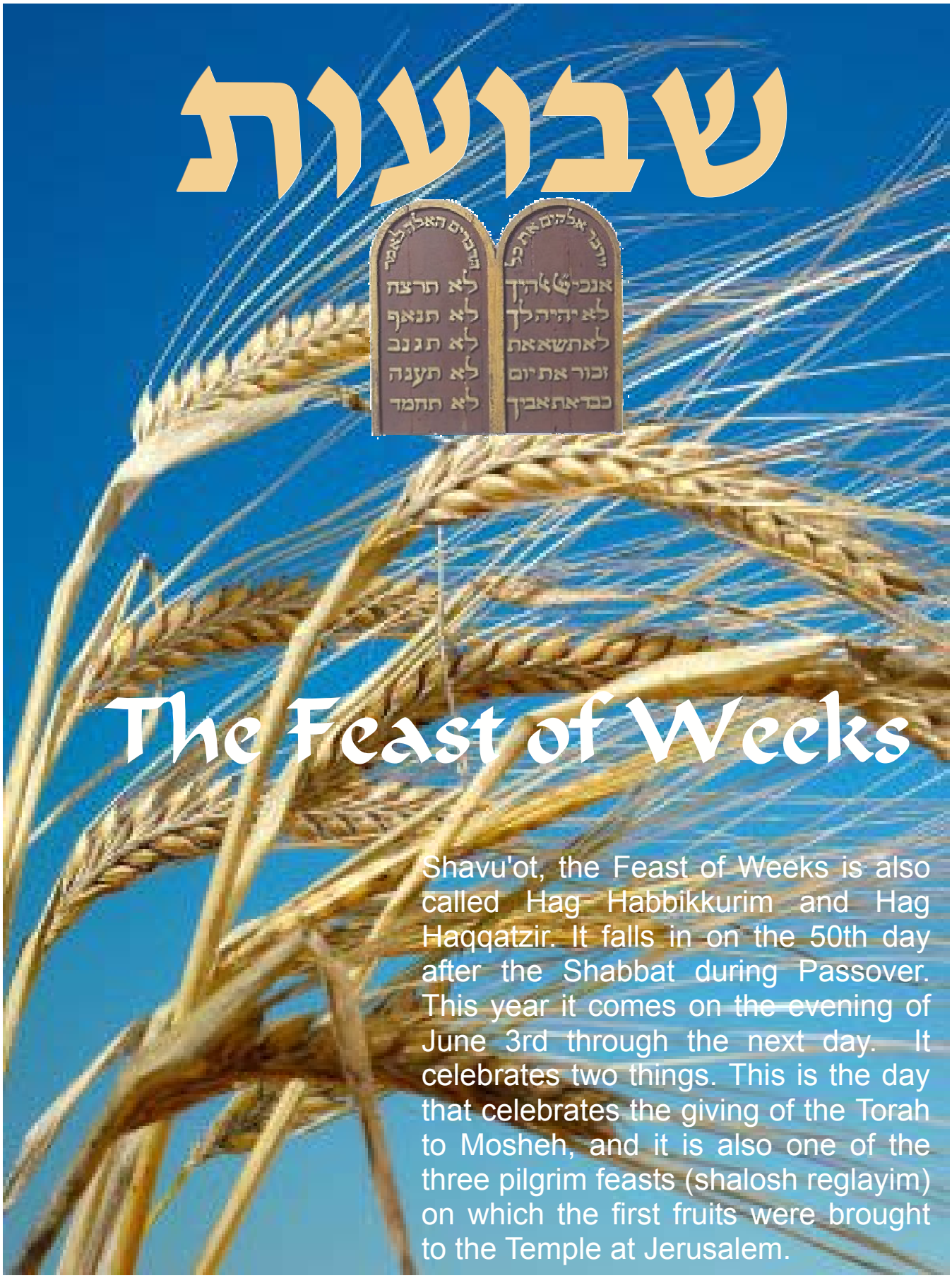
Ebionites distinguish between prayer and public worship where benedictions and statements of faith are given. There will be an Ebionite siddur ("prayerbook") and some Ebionites presently use the siddurs of other movements.

Do Ebionites avoid any occupations? Yes. They should avoid any occupation that requires them to exploit others, and specific sins mentioned in the Tanak, for example, usury (lending money at interest). The Torah was given to the People of God, and so some believe that it is allowable for Jews to serve as usurers to gentiles. But if one works for a bank (financial organization) there is no foolproof way to ensure that you will not be involved in lending money to fellow Jews at interest, or exploiting others who would defame the name of the faith of the lender, or those who would be favorable to the religion of God otherwise. Administrators from the Evyonim for businesses or government must act justly as a servant and not a ruler. Those who act unjustly are liable for their actions before the Ebionite Bet Din and could be reprimanded to repent before the community. A person should carefully consider what their job asks them to do in the light of scripture.

How are Ebionites governed? The community is led by the *Paqid*, who is the official representative and "acting president" although a *paqid* is not a democratically elected leader. The Paqid oversees the community as a whole, and its confederate parts, whether congregations or *havurot* (informal worship and study groups). But locally an appointed teacher approved also by the Paqid may reside. These also work in close conjunction with the Paqid to coordinate efforts of the community as a whole. Once a Paqid is succeeded, choosing to step down, he may be called upon as an adviser and a member of the Bet Din, and should be held in respect.

Assisting the Paqid officially are seven advisers which serve in rotation recruited from all Ebionites to represent a cross section according to age, background and experience. From those seven a bet din ("court") of three can be convened in times of need to judge over a disagreement or controversy, to acknowledge actions of the Paqid and community, conversions, marriages, divorces, and to take care of other issues. The bet din is chosen by lot from among the seven. The bet din can appoint a representative to carry out their decisions. Examples include sending a representative or delegation to oversee a conversion, or choosing a secretary to conduct financial or business matters and to keep records of the community.

The position of Paqid was reestablished in 2000 for the first time in many centuries. The position will be handed down to a successor in turn, and continue to be transferred, from Paqid to Paqid. Halakha of the community is established by the Paqid assisted by a Bet Din and advisers.


שבועות
The Feast of Weeks
Shavu'ot, the Feast of Weeks is also called Hag Habbikkurim and Hag Haqqatzir. It falls in on the 50th day after the Shabbat during Passover. This year it comes on the evening of June 3rd through the next day. It celebrates two things. This is the day that celebrates the giving of the Torah to Mosheh, and it is also one of the three pilgrim feasts (shalosh reglayim) on which the first fruits were brought to the Temple at Jerusalem.

It culminates after counting the Omer, the seven weeks of days on the 50th day. This is why some people call it Pentecost, from a Greek word penthkosth meaning to "count fifty." This is a period of time between the barley and wheat harvests, finishing the grain harvesting. (Sukkot in the Fall marks the fruit harvest.) But also it is linked to the same length of time between Passover as the feast of liberation from Egypt and at Shavu'ot when B'nai Yisrael accepted the Torah given to Mosheh. The Christian Pentecost falls on the seventh Sunday after Easter and thus is not the same holiday.

In the days of the Temple the first fruits were not a required offering but one given freely.

> Deut 16:9 Seven weeks, shalt thou count unto thee,—from the beginning of thrusting in the sickle into the standing corn, shalt thou begin to count, seven weeks.
> 10 So shalt thou keep the festival of weeks unto Yahweh thy God, in the measure of the freewill offering of thy hand, which thou shalt give,—as Yahweh thy God, shall bless thee.
> 11 So shalt thou rejoice before Yahweh thy God—thou, and thy son and thy daughter, and thy servant and thy handmaid, and the Levite who is within thy gates, and the sojourner, and the fatherless and the widow, who are in thy midst,—in the place which Yahweh thy God shall choose, to make a habitation for his name there.

According to Leviticus 23:15ff there is also a communal offering including two loafs of bread made from the new wheat. There is no work to be done on Shavu'ot.

There are numerous rabbinic customs associated with Shavu'ot. Some are full of meaning but hardly binding by anything but tradition. One custom worthy of imitation is the reading of the Book of Ruth.

Ruth features two elements pertinent to Shavu'ot. The scene for Ruth seems to be the barley and the wheat harvest season in which Shavu'ot occurs. Ruth is also a gentile who becomes a convert to God, accepting His Torah. We may add that Ruth is the ancestress of both Dawid Hammelek, and Yeshua, as well the future King Messiah. It expresses that anyone can join the People of God and embrace His Torah. This is in light of Deuteronomy (Devarim) 23:3 which says that an Ammonite or Moabite shall not enter the *qahal* of YHWH. (Ruth as a woman may not be included in the prohibition.)

Rabbinic custom are categorized with the acronym word '*aḥarît* (last). It stands for: *'Aqdamut*; *Halav*, *Rut*, *Yereq*, *Torah*. *'Aqdamut* is a religious poem (*piyut*) written in the Middle Ages by Rabbi Meir about God and Torah. It has 90 lines and the last word of each ends with the letters taw and 'alef, the first and last letter of the alef-bet to express the eternity of God and Torah. Halav concerns the custom of eating dairy foods on Shavu'ot. Rut is the reading of Ruth during morning services. Yereq is decorating the synagogue and homes with greenery to mark the New Year of Trees (since fruit from trees less than four years old cannot be eaten; Levit 19:23). And last, Torah, reminds them of a custom to study Torah throughout that night.

Some synagogues, I learned, will decorate the bimah (the raised platform where the Torah is read) with greenery and make it look like the marriage canopy (Ḥuppa) because the Torah is the ketuva (marriage contract) between Israel and YHWH. Interestingly, in an Ebionite marriage service, marriage is compared very deliberately to the union of Israel and God. In fact, Sfardi Jews read the piyut *Ketuva* (*'Aqdamut* is predominantly an Ashkenazi Jewish

custom. *Ketuva, based on Song of Songs,* is a much different poem written by a community under Muslim rule where Jews flourished at the time and were tolerated, while the Christians Europe tormented Jews. *'Aqdamut* was written after R. Meir's son was murdered by Christian Crusaders.). Customarily, weddings are not planned between Passover and Shavu'ot.

Modern Ebionite Customs

Over the years we have developed our own customs and readings. One is to abstain from sex beginning on Thursday evening until Sunday evening at the end of Shavu'ot. We immerse ourselves in the way available, preferably in a body of "living" water. This is based in Exodus (Sh'mot) 19. On Shavu'ot (Sunday morning) we blow shofars (ram's horn trumpets) in a way growing steadily louder in solemn manner for the Ten Words, and then we read Exodus 19:1-23:19. This is concluded by saying, "Na'aseh w'nishma`" (We will take and observe!) This will be further described as liturgy in the future Siddur for Mo'edim (a "prayerbook" for Holy Days). We also read Ruth and the passage beginning with Leviticus 23:15 describing the observance of Shavu'ot, as well as Deuteronomy 19:6ff.

Eating dairy products is also a nice custom. There is no clear biblical rationale for it. Ebionites are not required to separate milk and meat products according to rabbinic interpretation. If you read the passages above you will find the commandment concerning this. But we interpret it to mean a prohibition literally against cooking a suckling animal to eat with the milk of its mother. We are generally against killing and eating suckling animals. But enjoy an ice cream, key lime pie, milk shake "meal" "flowing milk and honey" anyway, if your stomach can bear it.

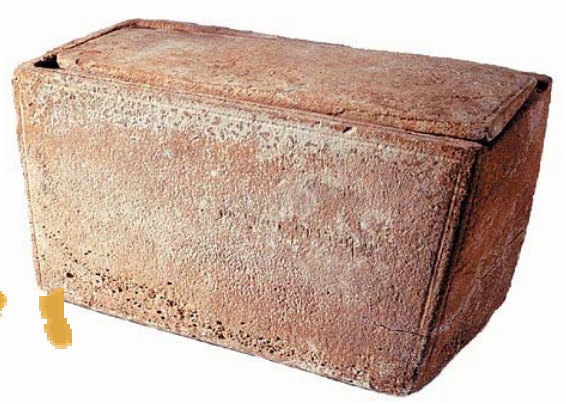
Jewish tradition says that the Torah (specifically the Ten Words) was offered to other nations of the world before Israel but they would have none of it. We do not believe this, and in the future when YHWH truly reigns over our lives, the gentiles will come to us and all Israel to learn and accept Torah. We remember that if Ruth were told to stay away, go home, remain a Moabite but observe the Noachide laws for gentiles, perhaps we would not have David the adopted son of God, Yeshua, the future King Messiah or a House of David to provide many of our greatest Jewish leaders and teachers.

For Ebionites the Torah is a social system that creates a holy world for all people. Shavu'ot is a wonderful time to celebrate this.

An Introduction to

JAMES

יעקוב



Ya`aqov as inscribed on the controversial ossuary which reads: *Ya`aqov bar-Yosef 'akhui d'Yeshu`a*, meaning, Ya`aqov son of Yosef brother of Yeshua

Of all of the writings used by the Christian Church, the Letter of James may be the most authentic and trustworthy to the teaching of Yeshua and his movement. Ya`aqov, we hold, was the blood sibling of Yeshua through their father Yosef and mother Miryam. Ya`aqov was undoubtedly the heir apparent to Yeshua's religious-political movement and the Davidic prince in line as the King of the Jews. In this capacity, Ya`aqov was Nasi' or prince. Likewise, among rabbinic Jews the leader Judah ben Gamliel ben Shimon, also reputed to be of the House of David, is called the "prince". The idea of Davidic descent and Davidic dynasties are not at all far-fetched considering in recent years the Chabad Luvavitch rebbe, Menachem Schneerson, and in past times the Vilna of Gaon (Eliyahu ben Shlomo Zalman Kremer), the Maharal (Y'hudah Loew), Rashi (Rav Shlomo Yarchi), the Baal Shem Tov (Rav Yisroel ben Eliezer), and others were said to be of the House of David.

In the Christianized gospels, Ya`aqov has little prominence in the movement, and it is Shimon (called Keyfa / Peter) who is depicted as being Yeshua's pick to rule over his "church" after his death. While the Christian Church has made much of this and the supposed apostolic succession to empower the organization at Rome, the original context of Yeshua's statement is misread.

Shimon acted as royal steward to the dynasty represented by Yeshua and Ya`aqov. The imagery for Yeshua giving Shimon the "keys of the kingdom" comes from the book of Isaiah 22:20 "It shall happen in that day, that I will call my servant Eliakim the son of Hilkiah: [21]and I will cloth him with your robe, and strengthen him with your belt, and I will commit your government into his hand; and he shall be a father to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and to the house of Judah. [22]The key of the house of David will I lay on his shoulder; and he shall open, and none shall shut; and he shall shut, and none shall open." It was Shimon's job to serve the dynasty begun by Yeshua the king and later prince Ya`aqov his heir apparent.

Yeshua as an adopted son of God, beloved, and anointed with holy spirit, patterned after David. The gospels' Davidic genealogies are offered clearly to show Yeshua's claim to be of David's House and rightful king of the Jews and he was executed as such. 1 Samuel describes the anointing of David and the descent of the holy spirit upon him. Psalm 2 speaks of how David was made an adopted son ("begotten") by God. When Yeshua was called son of God or son of David or messiah all referred simply to his being the rightful king long awaited after the Exile, and the existence of Jews under gentile rule by Persians, Greeks, Priestly regimes, Romans, and semi-Jewish Roman quislings. Yeshua was the king in a Davidic family from Galilee, who intended to set up a kingdom in which God would reign through His vice-regent, just as David and other righteous kings had acted vice-regents for God. Ya`aqov was next in line in the dynasty began with Yeshua.

James/ Ya`aqov is hardly spoken of in the Christian gospels, but suddenly after Yeshua has died, this man appears as the saintly head of the movement in Jerusalem to which all others report. Why? He is not an apostle. The twelve and then eleven then twelve again apostles are quite distinct from Ya`aqov. The apostles were in fact *talmidin*, students learning Yeshua's teachings to carry on the movement. Why twelve? Because Yeshua was setting up a government with twelve representatives for the twelve tribes of Israel (Matt 19:28), and although the majority of the tribes were "lost sheep" the tribal territories of the Land were existent but under gentile occupation, and very possibly Yeshua thought the anointed king should have a program to send out emissaries to find and return dispersed Israelites to the Land. Yeshua actually sent seventy followers as emissaries before him where he intended to go (Luke 10:1), just as Ya`aqov will be mindful of the twelve tribes of the Diaspora in his letter. In Hebrew thinking the number seventy represents the nations of the world (Gen 10), and these represented all the lands in which Israelites might be found. This also means that Yeshua had a more biblical plan of missions in which restoring Israel entire was the top of the agenda, also reflected in the vision of Revelation 7. Only afterward will come multitudes of gentiles who will come to worship God (Rev 7; Zech 8). Yet gentiles who came to God before this program were not turned away by Yeshua or any Jews of his day. Ya`aqov is addressing to people who at this time in history were "lost tribes," not just Judeans living in the trading cities of the Roman world. He was expecting the restoration of Israel, the gathering of the dispersed, perhaps an reawakened Israel after centuries of cultural amnesia. Nowhere are "new" Israelites as a replacement of Jews addressed by either Yeshua or Ya`aqov, originally.

"Of all of the writings used by the Christian Church, the Letter of James may be the most authentic and trustworthy to the teaching of Yeshua and his movement."

This flies in the face of an alleged thirteenth apostle whose rejection of biblical faith sent him solely to gentiles, and whose stratagems re-colors the real message of Yeshua and his movement. As we will see, this little book of "James" refutes the unauthorized teachings of that scoundrel, the *'ish kazav*, Paul of Tarsus, and as a result barely made it into the Christian scriptures.

In spite of Christianity's sidestepping Ya`aqov's importance to Yeshua's movement, demoting him to a position of obscurity while worshipping the evil teachings of Paul, Ya`aqov was honored by our physical and spiritual forefathers, and politely by Christians also, so great was his witness as a true man of God. To them he is called James the Just or Righteous, just as we call him *Ya`aqov haṣṣādîq*.

In various writings we can ascertain the preeminence of Ya`aqov for the followers of Yeshua and others. The movement's adversary Paul admits to Ya`aqov's rule over it telling his readers that he stood before Ya`aqov to make an account of himself (Gal 1:19; 2:9), calling him (in a derogative way) "pillar" of the Yeshuine community (2:9), and saying that the resurrected Yeshua appeared first to Ya`aqov (1 Cor 15:7).

In the *Gospel of Thomas*, logion 11 (82.25-30), Ya`aqov is clearly the successor of Yeshua in the tradition coming down to its author. "The disciples said to Yeshua, "We know you will leave us. Who is going to be our ruler over us then? Yeshua said to them, 'Wherever you find yourself, go to Ya`aqov the Just One, for whose sake heaven and earth has come into existence." Although Thomas has Gnostic overtones, it still recognizes the primacy of Ya`aqov.

The Christian history writer, Eusebius draws on previous witnesses, including Clement of Rome who he claims says concerning Ya`aqov:

> Control of the Church passed to the apostles, together with the Lord's brother James, whom everyone from the Lord's time till our own has called the righteous, for there were many James, but this one was holy from his birth; he drank no wine or intoxicating liquor and ate no animal food; no razor came near his head; he did not smear himself with oil, and took no baths. He alone was permitted to enter the Holy Place, for his garments were not of wool but of linen. He used to enter the Sanctuary alone, and was often found on his knees beseeching forgiveness for the people, so that his knees grew hard like a camel's from continually bending them in worship of God and beseeching forgiveness for the

people. Because of his unsurpassable righteousness he was called the Righteous and Oblias – in our own language 'Bulwark of the People, and Righteousness' – fulfilling the declaration of the prophets regarding him. *EH* 2.23.5-6

This description could hardly be authentic for a number of reasons. Ya`aqov was not likely to have been a priest or able to enter the inner sanctuary of the Temple as a high priest. Yet it is not impossible. First, Ya`aqov would obviously represent a lower class or opposition group of priests, as any priest in the Yeshuine movement would be, and such conflicts are reported by Josephus in which two groups of priests actually got into a rock fight (*Antiquities* 20:180). A interesting link between the House of David and priesthood can be found in 2 Samuel 8:15, not made clear in some English translations which has "…David's sons were chief rulers," yet the Hebrew gives *kohanim* "priests. Additionally, James Tabor posits that the genealogy in Luke presents Miryam's side of the family with both Davidic and Aaronic descent (2006: pp. 51-7). But to approach the Temple precincts unwashed or ritually immersed is even more impossible to believe. Vegetarianism is not a type of righteousness, but could explain that Ya`aqov may not have considered sacrifices under the current Temple administration to be fit or holy, and he was certainly not alone in that opinion, nor would such a statement be lost on other Jews. (The subject of vegetarianism of Ya`aqov and alleged Ebionite vegetarianism will be discussed in a future article.) In fact, Ya`aqov was apparently highly admired by fellow Jews.

Fellow Jews were upset when Ya`aqov and some others were seized by an impromptu convening of a Sanhedrin by the high priest Ananus (a Sadducee) during an absence in the post of procurator. Before the new procurator Albinus could arrive, they had them stoned as lawbreakers. Did Ya`aqov enter the Holy of Holies on the Day of Purgation as an opposition high priest? This could be the reason for Ananus to seek his death. We have reason to believe that Paul of Tarsus was involved in the stoning of Ya`aqov (to be taken up in a future article). People went out to meet Albinus and also to complain to Judean king Agrippa, and Ananus was removed from the position (Josephus, *Antiquities*, 20.9). The common people did not willingly support the establishment priesthood made up of wealthy priests with ties to the Romans. From this point in Josephus with the new procurator Albinus, things go from bad to worse for Judea as political and class conflicts continued. Under the next establishment high priest Matthias, appointed by king Agrippa, the first war with Rome began.

It took centuries for the Letter of James to be acceptable to the Christian Church although it is one of the earlier writings, very possibly contemporary with Paul's letters and evidently in opposition to the Pauline heresy. Christians at Alexandria used James as scripture in the third century, the Western Church about a century later, and finally the Syrian Church another hundred years later. Yet Christians seem to have always had problems with James because of its obvious position against Paul's of salvation by faith and anti-Torah teachings. The father of Protestantism, Martin Luther criticized James and wanted to leave it out of the Protestant Christian canon of scripture.

Others say, including Origen in the third century and Eusebius in the fourth century doubts *James'* authenticity. Part of this was based on the fine Greek writing style of *James*. A convert to Judaism and Ebionite named Symmachus (Sumkos, the student of R. Meir, in *b. `Eruvin* 13b?) translated the Hebrew Scriptures into Greek in the late second century (ca., 170) and his Greek is also noted for its literal accuracy and good use of Greek idiom. Not being an expert in Greek, I make note to the oldest Greek manuscript evidence for the Letter of James being from the same time period of Symmachus' Greek translation. Papyrus 23 ($\mathfrak{p}^{23}$) dated by papyrologists Kurt and Barbara Alands have dated it to the third century, but some scholars have pointed out its 2nd century style of writing. $\mathfrak{p}$23 was found at Oxyrhynchus, Egypt and it is a fragment of a codex page showing James 1:10-12 on its front and James 1:15-18 on back. This not mean that Symmachus translated *James* from Aramaic of Hebrew, but it does indicate that at least one skilled translator sympathetic to the ideas and beliefs of Ebionites reflected in *James* existed. This could explain the fine Greek of *James*.

It is interesting to note that there are more direct parallels to the words attributed to Yeshua in the gospels than any of the remaining Christian writings. Here are some of them:

1:2 Joy in the midst of trials -Matt. 5:10-12
1:4 Exhortation to perfection -Matt. 5:48
1:5 Asking for good gifts -Matt. 7:7ff.
1:20 Against anger -Matt. 5:22
1:22 Hearers and doers of the Word -Matt. 7:24ff.
2:10 The whole law to be kept -Matt. 5:19
2:13 Blessings of mercifulness -Matt. 5:7

3:18 Blessings of peacemakers -Matt. 5:9
4:4 Friendship of the world as enmity against God -Matt. 6:24
4:11-12 Against judging others -Matt. 7:1-5
5:2ff. Moth and rust spoiling riches -Matt. 6:19
5:10 The prophets as examples -Matt. 5:12
5:12 Against oaths -Matt. 5:33-37

There are (Christian) arguments against James being an authentic writing of Ya`aqov. The arguments can be summed up:

1. The cultured language of James is not that of a simple Palestinian. Contra: See above concerning dating of Greek mss.

2. It is scarcely conceivable that the Lord's brother, who remained faithful to the Law, could have spoken of "the perfect law of freedom" (1:25) or that he could have given concrete expression to the Law in ethical commands (2:11 f) without mentioning even implicitly any cultic-ritual requirements. Contra: The Perfect Law of Freedom is the Torah. His audience was Jews and therefore, there was no need of elucidating Torah but only the approach to Torah taken by Yeshua and himself. Keeping oneself unblemished from the world refers to purity symbolically as separating from the gentile the system as contamination, as the Temple had become contaminated by them.

3. Would the brother of the Lord really omit any reference to Jesus and his relationship to him, even though the author of James emphatically presents himself in an authoritative role? Contra: Yes. Ya`aqov was humble, and his audience knew who he was. His authority was his own within the movement, as the Nasi' acting within it.

4. The debate in 2:14 ff with a misunderstood secondary stage of Pauline theology not only presupposes a considerable chronological distance from Paul - whereas James died in the year 62 - but also betrays complete ignorance of the polemical intent of Pauline theology, which lapse can scarcely be attributed to James, who as late as 55/56 met with Paul in Jerusalem (Acts 21:18 ff). Contra: The relationship between Paul and Ya`aqov was not amiable, Paul was not a member of the community but a heretic, and the Christian writings seek to disguise this. The Letter of James exposes this in Ya`aqov's directly teaching against Paul.

5. As the history of the canon shows (see 27.2), it was only very slowly and against opposition that James became recognized as the work of the Lord's brother, therefore as apostolic and canonical. Thus there does not seem to have been any old tradition that it originated with the brother of the Lord. Contra: James disagrees with Christian doctrine, and Christianity being a departure from Yeshuine faith would not honor this writing until its arguments and protagonists could be neutralized by time under a gentile church which would make James a heretic.

I believe that the existing Letter of James originated in an authentic directive from the Nasi' Ya`aqov, the *tzaddiq*, and second ruler of the Davidic dynasty of Yeshua. The Letter of James is important for Evyonim as it represents the writing from an authentic Yeshuine leader and body with little or no corruption on behalf of the Church and Paulinism. The Letter is a Jewish product and points out several flaws in the Pauline heresy and I believe reveals Paul and his teaching as false.

I first work on a translation of James as a Jewish writing over twenty years ago simultaneously with my similar treatment of Matthew. I shied away from it for a time as I tried to establish what "messiah" means in its proper context in order to wean *talmidim* from the "messianic/ Christian" corruption of the idea. With a number of popular books clarifying what a messiah is and is not to assist me, and the development of the Ebionite Community as a body of more mature, de-Christianized people, I feel that I can again present the Letter of James as a statement in which Ebionites can take comfort. Here we offer a slighty revised translation of James based on my earlier work. In the near future I will continue notes on James which will analyze its meaning and show how it stands against Paul in many ways.

The Letter of JAMES

1

1

Ya`aqov, servant of God, also of the master, Yeshua the anointed:
To those of the twelve tribes of the Diaspora—Shalom!

My brothers,
Consider it complete blessedness when you fall into various trials, realizing that the proving of your faith develops endurance. And let your endurance have mature result, so that you will be mature and complete, lacking in no way. But if any of you are lacking wisdom, let him be asking God who gives openly and does not criticize unjustly and it will be given to him. But let him ask in sincerity, not inconsistency, because the inconsistent is like a wave of the sea, wind-driven and storm-tossed. Therefore, do not let the man such as this presume that he will receive anything from YHWH. A double-minded man is unstable in all his ways.

9

Let the humble brother rejoice in his aspiration; but the rich in his becoming humble—because like the flower of grass, he will pass away. Indeed, the sun rose high with burning heat and the grass withered, its flower fell off, and the beauty of its appearance perished—likewise, the rich man in his pursuits will fade away.

12

Blessed the man who holds up under trial, because having become worthy, he will receive the crown of the Life, which the master promised to those loving him. Let no one say, 'I am tempted by God.' because God is not tempted by evil things, nor does he tempt anyone. But each is tempted by their own craving, being lured and entrapped. Then the lust, having conceived, gives birth to transgression; and the transgression, having become full-grown, brings death!

16

Do not be deceived, my beloved brothers. Any suitable gift and any true benefit is

from above, coming down from the Father of Lights, with whom there is no changing or eclipse.

18
Because he wished so, he brought us into existence by the true word so that we can be a type of first-fruits among his creatures.

19
And thus, my brothers, let every man be quick to listen, slow to take issue, slow to become angry; the anger of man does not produce the righteous purpose of God. So, in discarding all filthiness and excessive malice, embrace in gentleness the implanted word which is able to save your lives! And become doers of the word, not just hearers, deceiving yourselves. If one is a hearer of the word, but not a practitioner, the same is comparable to a man seeing the face of his birth in a mirror—he looked at himself but immediately went away, forgetting what kind he was. But he who continuously looks into the perfect Torah freely-accepted and remains—not becoming a forgetful hearer, but instead a worker—the same will be blessed in his effort.

26
If anyone not controlling his tongue imagines being pious, (he) deceives his heart instead—this one's piety is worthless. Pure, untainted religion in regard to God the Father is such: seeing to the welfare of orphans and widows during their hardship, and keeping oneself unblemished from the world.

2
1
My brothers, do not hold to the belief of our master, Yeshua, the Glorious One's anointed, with one showing favoritism to persons: If a man comes into your synagogue wearing gold rings on his fingers, in a fine robe, while there also enters a poor man, in dirty clothing—(Will you) look at the one wearing the splendid robe, and say, 'You, sit here in comfort!' but to the poor man, you say, 'You, stand there, or sit beneath my footrest!' —did you not make a difference among yourselves, becoming judges with twisted opinions?

5
My beloved brothers, listen to me! Has God not chosen the Poor of the world—rich in faith and heirs of the Reign that he promises to those loving Him? But you dishonor the Poor! Do the wealthy not tyrannize you? —and these same drag you into legal proceedings! Do they not revile the honorable name you are called by?

8
If you are really perfecting the Torah of the King on account of the scripture, 'You must

love your neighbor as yourself.' you do well. But if you are showing favoritism, you practice transgression and are convicted by the Torah as transgressors. Indeed, those observing the Torah who fails at one has become guilty of the whole. Indeed, He who said, 'You must not commit adultery!' also said, 'You must not murder!' So, if you do not commit adultery, but you murder, you are a Torah-breaker! Speak and act according to this, because by a Torah freely-accepted you are destined to be judged. Surely, the Judgment will be merciless to one who has not been merciful—mercy triumphs over judgment.

14
What is the advantage, my brothers, if one may claim to have faith, but has not works?—Faith is not able to save such a person! If a brother or sister is without clothing and lacks food for the day, and one among you was to say to them, 'Be well! Be warm and full!' but you have not given the necessities of the body, what is the point?

17
And so, belief by itself, without works, is dead! Perhaps, someone will say, 'You have works, but I have faith!' —you show me your faith without works—I will show you faith by my works!

19
You believe that YHWH is Alone—you do well!—even the evil spirits believe, and tremble!

20
But do you want to be certain, O' Empty One, that belief with works is dead? Was not 'Avraham, our forefather, made righteous through actions, taking up his son Yitzkhaq to a sacrifice altar? You must realize his belief worked with his actions, and through the actions his faith became fully mature. And the scripture came true, saying:

23b
"...But 'Avraham trusted in God and it was considered as his righteousness...."

24
And he was called, Friend of God. Do you see, that a man is made righteous by actions, and not just belief?

25
Likewise, was not the whore, Rakhav, also made righteous by actions, giving the scouts shelter and sending them out by another way? Just as the body that is without breath is dead, so also, belief without actions is dead.

3

1

You should not become many teachers, my brothers, knowing we will receive a more severe judgment. Because we all stumble in many ways—if anyone can speak without stumbling, he is a matured man and able to bridle the whole body! Hinneh! We put bits into the mouths of horses in order that they be made obedient to us, and we turn their entire body about! Hinneh! Ships also, being so massive, being driven by uncontrollable winds, are turned about by a little rudder wherever the whim of the helmsman pleases!

5

Likewise, the tongue is also a little part, but boasts of great things! Hinneh! A little fire lights a forest! Indeed, the tongue is a fire—the ornament of iniquity! The tongue is appointed among our bodily parts as that defiling the whole body—setting the wheel of creation on fire, being inflamed by Gehinnom!

7

Every species of wild creature, birds, reptiles, sea life, is overcome and has been dominated by the human species. But the human tongue none is able to tame!—unrestrainedly evil, full of deadly poison!

9

With it we praise God the Father, but with it we curse men—those who have created according to the likeness of God. Out of the same mouth goes praising and cursing. It is not necessary, my brothers, that things be like this. Does a spring run sweet and bitter out of the same opening? My brothers, is a fig tree able to produce olives, or the vine figs? Likewise, neither can salt sweeten water.

13

Which among you is wise and experienced? Out of a worthy lifestyle let him show his works with unpretentious wisdom. But if you hold to bitter competition, and aggression is in your heart, do you not presume and speak falsely according to the truth? That is not the wisdom coming down from above, but rather earthly, physical, and of bad spirit. Because wherever there is competition and aggression there is confusion and every bad practice.

17

But the wisdom from above, principally, is truly sinless, followed by (these attributes): peaceful, gentle, easily directed, full of mercy and appropriate fruits, without favoritism, without pretending. The fruits of righteousness are planted in peace by those making peace.

4

1

From where do the disputes and fights come among you? Is it not from this?—from your desires of pleasure struggling within your bodily parts? You crave, but do not get; you murder and are zealous, but unable to conquer; you fight and quarrel; you do not have because you do not ask. You ask, but do not receive because you ask wrongfully in order to waste it in your pleasure seeking.

4

Adulterers! Do you not realize that friendship with the worldly system is hatred toward God? Therefore, whoever would resolve himself to be a friend with worldly system is a declared enemy of God. Or do you think the scripture is uselessly stated? The impulse placed within us longs in jealousy. But greater is the loving-kindness he gives, as it says:

6b

"God sets Himself in opposition to the proud,
but to the humble-minded he gives loving-kindness."

7

Therefore, be obedient to God, go out to battle against the Accuser, and he will flee from you! Draw near to God and he will draw near to you; wash your hands, transgressors; purge your hearts, double-minded ones! Suffer misery, mourn, weep out loud; let joy turn to shame. Bring yourself low in the sight of YHWH, and He will lift you up!

11

Brothers, do not speak badly of each other—the one speaking ill of a brother, criticizing his brother, speaks ill of the Torah, indeed, criticizes the Torah—but if you judge the Torah, you are not a adherent of the Torah, but a judge! One is the Lawgiver and the Judge, He who is able to save or destroy! Who are you to judge another?

13

Consider now, you, saying, 'Today or tomorrow we might go to a certain city...might stay there a year...might trade and make a profit...' (You) who knows nothing about tomorrow—what is your existence—it's vapor with a slight appearing then disappearing.

5

1

Here now O' rich! Weep out loud! Howl over the miseries coming to you! Your

abundance has rotted away, your clothing has is moth-ridden. Your gold and silver are corroded, and its rust will be your testament, and will consume your bodies like the fire you store up for the last days! Look! The wage you held back from the workers who harvested your fields cries out! The pitiful complaints of the harvesters have come to the ears of YHWH Tseva`ot! You have lived luxuriously from the earth and you have been unrestrained—you have fattened your hearts for the Day of slaughter! You condemned! You murdered the Righteous One!—(it is) not he that opposes you!

7
Be patient, brothers, until the Coming of the Sovereign—beware! The Planter expects the priceless fruit of the earth, waiting patiently until he receives it after the early (autumn) and the latter (spring) rains. So you be patient, secure your hearts because the Shekinah of YHWH has come near.

9
Do not complain against each other, brothers, so that you will not be judged—Look! The Judge has been standing before the doors! As an example of endurance of evil and being patient, consider the Nevi'im who spoke in the Name of YHWH. Those who patiently endured we call blessed. The patience of 'Iyyov you have heard of, and the result due to YHWH you know; indeed, YHWH is full of kindness and mercy.

12
Concerning anything, my brothers, do not swear—not by Heaven, not by earth, or any type of oath; let your yes be yes, and your no be no—so you will not come under judgment. If ones suffers evil, let them pray; let the cheerful sing. Is there sick among you? Let the elders of the community pray for them, having applied oil in the Name of YHWH. The faithful prayer will save the sick, and YHWH will raise him (out of bed); if he has made transgressions they will be forgotten.

16
Admit your faults to each other, and pray for each other for healing—well-intentioned entreaty is very effective.

17
'Eliyah was a man with difficulties similar to ours, and he offered up a prayer to stop rain, and it did not rain upon the land for three years and six months. Again he prayed, and the heavens gave rain, and the land put forth its fruit.

19
My brothers, if any one of you strays from the truth, and anyone is able to turn him back, let him know, that he turning a transgressor from his straying path will rescue his life from death, and put away a great number of transgressions.

Our Liberation

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